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**Uncomfortable Positions:  
How Policy Practitioners Negotiate Difficult Subjects**

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

July 2011

## **DECLARATION**

The work presented in this thesis is my own.

Signed

Hannah Jones

## **Abstract**

This thesis examines how policy practitioners negotiate difficult subjects, specifically the difficult subjects entailed in negotiations around community cohesion policy. The research applies a governmentality perspective to consider how people working *within* government (using techniques of governmentality to govern populations) are subject to regimes of governmentality *themselves*. A substantial body of the research is based on detailed ethnographic work (both participant observation and extensive semi-structured, reflexive qualitative interviews with policy practitioners) in Hackney, an inner London borough with a very diverse population (in terms of ethnicity, economic status, migration histories, beliefs and experiences). Hackney rarely appears in narratives of community cohesion policy, and local practitioners have framed it as a place that is comfortable with diversity – a success story of twenty-first century multiculturalism. Often this story is told (in everyday talk and in official documents) by reference to places which have come to epitomise 'community cohesion problems', specifically Oldham (representing segregation between white and Asian communities, the potential for explosive violence), Barking and Dagenham (standing for problems with a disenfranchised 'white working class' turning to racist extremism) and Peterborough (as a place coping with sudden large-scale new immigration). The thesis follows these narratives, interviewing policy practitioners in each of these places to understand how they negotiate community cohesion policy from within the narrative, as well as policy practitioners working with local government at the national level who shed light on how places, communities and the practice of policy are understood from this location. The thesis raises questions of how to understand practices of government, and the uncomfortable and ambiguous ethical negotiations such practices sometimes entail; the importance of place and place-branding in governing; the relationship of narrative, place and governing to questions of material power inequalities; and the potential for understanding government through a 'sociological imagination'.

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## Introduction: to a sociologist's imagination

Hannah: Do you think your background or identity affects how you think about cohesion?

Rachel: God it must do. It must do! I suppose I think that it's not really about me, you know that it's something other... we talk about communities... I probably think about ethnic minority communities, and people who are poor... And it's something other, to me... something that I watch rather than partake. Although actually, that's just so not true, I mean for me personally.<sup>1</sup>

This extract from an interview with Rachel, a policy practitioner in Hackney, illustrates some, if not all, of the themes at the heart of the thesis. Though she begins with a separation between herself and 'something other' out there, 'the community' to be governed, when I asked Rachel about community cohesion policy in particular, with its connotations at least of having a broader remit relevant to 'everyone', Rachel's instinct was to say that her suggestion that she lives apart from diversity was 'so not true' (and she went on to describe aspects of her home life that supported this assertion). My question about whether her 'background or identity' affected how she thought about cohesion was deliberately worded openly (see Chapter Two) and based on trends I had seen through initial research; and at this prompting, Rachel exclaims that 'It must do!'. That is, she has imbibed a type of reflexivity-as-reflex-action when meeting a question framed in these terms, even though she adds that her everyday manner is to think of 'the community' as separate from her (white, professional, middle-class) self. So the space between her work of 'doing things to' the community as a local government employee, and being part of a shared community herself (and promoting such a 'whole community' vision as part of a local authority) is evident in Rachel's brief comments here, as is the suggestion that these two models exist *simultaneously*. Not only this, but Rachel recognises some of these contradictions as she describes them to me (between living together with 'others' while seeing them as different to herself, between local

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<sup>1</sup> Names of interviewees have been changed to preserve anonymity (see Chapter Two). Within interview excerpts, an ellipsis indicates that some speech has been omitted. Occasionally short affirmations or parts of speech have been omitted without notation, for the sake of clarity.

government being for 'everybody' or being about doing things to others, between being part of the community and part of its government, between recognising (her own) power and treating it as an invisible given), but also says that she would usually treat them as unseen and unacknowledged.

Finally, *this exchange is an emotional or affective one*; it is between two specific people, Rachel and myself, in the situation of a research interview where we had known each other slightly as colleagues in previous years, where she was senior to me, but where I was interviewing her about subjects she may not have previously articulated in this way, to analyse later in my own terms, and where we both had some idea (or assumptions) about a shared position as white middle class female professional local authority policy workers in inner London. Thus her anxiety about her reading of community is openly presented ('God it must do'), while my only intervention following my question is a series of encouraging affirmations ('yeah' and 'mm', which have been edited out of the extract above for clarity). Rachel, like many others, repeatedly said 'you know' as she explored difficult subjects, implicitly drawing me into a complicity or assumed understanding of how she was exploring the discussion. This apparent empathy in the interview situation allows a certain level of vulnerability which is evident in much of the interview data in the thesis, where policy practitioners discuss subjects in terms that might be surprising for those unfamiliar with these worlds, who might expect them to be experts and to speak fluently and cogently about what they mean by 'community' and interventions in it. That kind of polished response can of course be found in documents, speeches, and action plans produced by many of those I interviewed. But the ability to explore these questions in a more open manner, one that stretched boundaries to consider how decisions are made *over time*, and how government is practised, was dependent on relationships built around a certain level of shared affect – trust, understanding, anxiety, expectation, obligation – even community.

Affect, emotion<sup>2</sup> and relationships are central to this thesis because they are central to

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<sup>2</sup> Though I recognise that a distinction is sometimes made between affect (as an embodied feeling) and emotion (as the articulation of that feeling) (Gould, 2010:27), in this thesis I follow Ahmed

how organisations, and specifically governing organisations, work. Organisations depend on people persuading one another to follow particular courses of action, by drawing on resources which sometimes include coercive or disciplinary power; or allusion to this power through status differentials and self-regulation based on acceptance of differences in power and status; or using elements of desire as tools of persuasion. All of these resources operate at the level of *people* doing the persuading, choosing, and self-regulation – within structural constraints. The workings of organisations are thus mediated through embodied and affective relationships, and experienced in emotional terms. But recognising this does not mean that governing and organisations are being reduced to the irrational, inexplicable, or ineffable. Emotions are powerful, and power operates through emotions.

The operation of power through persuasive, emotive means is often enacted through the sense-making of narrative techniques. In this sense, policy and government can be understood to be about creating and disseminating compelling narratives – what makes a narrative 'compelling' is its affective power. The thesis treats such narratives as important, following stories around both as a strategy for analysis and for data collection. Through the thesis, I follow multiple narratives of community cohesion policy, of place, of how people understand and explain their own encounters within government. This thesis does not attempt to present a narrative of what community cohesion policy (or community cohesion) 'is', or even of what government 'is'. Rather, I discuss how such concepts are understood and used; and these understandings and uses are usually presented in the form of narrative, and thus through appeals to affect and intuition.

This is quite a different approach to understanding emotion and well-being in policy-making to that which has recently gained a spike in publicity in Britain and internationally (e.g. Theodoropolou and Zuleeg, 2009; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009) which is characterised (sometimes unfairly) as 'measuring happiness'. Within that movement there are differences, not least between those interested in a more

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(2004:6) and Sayer (2005:36) in understanding emotions as both embodied *and* cognitive; as such, I tend to use the terms 'affect' and 'emotion' interchangeably.

developed sense of how to understand 'well-being' beyond economic aggregates (Stiglitz et al, 2009), and those more interested in quantifying 'happiness' whilst ignoring power relations (Mulgan and Davies, 2011). But both of these approaches are quite different to a consideration of how power relations and structural inequalities of power operate through affective relationships, which is one of my aims in this thesis.

So 'relationships' have more than one resonance here. Because community cohesion is, in one simplified version, about 'living together with difference' (a phrase which raises a number of questions in itself), it is centrally about (affective) relationships between people – which when simplified too far can become simple 'common sense' about 'getting on' which obscures the power relations that might determine why and how people are 'different' and why and how they may or may not 'get on' with each other (see Chapter Three for a detailed examination of the resonances of community cohesion policy in its various guises). Discourses which resort to affect and feeling as measurable goals of government (and the responsibility of governed individuals) can bypass structural causes of problems, and are discussed in relation to theorisation of governmentality in Chapter One.

In Chapter One, *Difficult Subjects*, I consider the literature on public sociology and on governmentality. I argue that existing literature on governmentality (the processes of governing that require individuals to take responsibility for making (the right) decisions about their lives, in line with societal norms) can be developed to take account of the processes of governing through norms *within* structures of government. That is, I suggest that this thesis will make an original contribution by examining the *practices* of governing, rather than the more usual material of texts and documents used in studies of governmentality. Further, I argue that while attention to emotion in studies of community cohesion policy have viewed emotionalism as a way of obscuring attention to power, we should pay attention to emotive registers as a way in which power is exercised. In particular, the potential discomforts of being made aware of inequalities of power, particularly those in which one is implicated, are often experienced and articulated emotionally, and this also informs how people respond to such inequalities as agents within government. As I argue in the chapter, policy practitioners often

articulate and use sociological analyses to understand and develop their work. In this sense, they could perhaps be considered public sociologists; and I consider recent debates about the meanings of public sociology and how these might be articulated differently if we allowed sociology, or the academy more widely, to enter and engage with the messiness of *doing* as well as *thinking*; to intervene as well as to critique. The blurred boundaries that are revealed are one of the subjects of this thesis, as I explore what it means when sociological analysis is used in the practice of governing, not only as a technocratic tool, but as a way of understanding the less visible, day-to-day negotiations of power and their personal consequences.

In Chapter Two, I explore how I put this position into practice through my research methodology. I look at how previous research has approached questions of policy and particularly community cohesion policy and related subjects. I argue that there has been a lack of attention to the *practice* of policy and to taking seriously the narratives, understandings and compromises made by those involved in practices of governing. The chapter shows how I have used an inductive methodology, following narratives from within the data, using a variety of methods. The ethnographic element of my research draws on my experiences from before the research project was officially 'underway', though my engagement with policy worlds as a practitioner continued throughout. This engagement means I am able to draw on my own experience, though I do not assume that this is representative of others'. I had access as an 'insider' and, later in the thesis, explore some of these situations. Being engaged in the world I was researching also provided me with access to, and relationships of trust with, other practitioners. Through in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews I spent time reflecting on and interpreting these practitioners' experiences with them. All of this was informed by use of documentary sources, understanding these not simply as texts to be interpreted, but as artefacts-in-use. The rest of that chapter explains some of the techniques of analysis I used on the data, and how the inductive, interpretative design of the study led me to follow narratives of community cohesion policy that were rooted in or anchored *against* place. As a result, I developed a research design that led from local practitioners in Hackney (and national practitioners engaged with local government) to places which, as I will show, often act as markers in narratives of

community cohesion policy, namely Oldham, Barking and Dagenham, and Peterborough.

Chapter Three explores these narratives in more detail, though not in a typical chronological form. To understand the ways that community cohesion policy is understood, I look at how meanings and ideas are grouped into sets of intertwining narratives which support but also contradict one another, but are all easily identified in accounts of 'what community cohesion means'. This chapter provides context for the rest of the empirical material in the thesis by following four narratives, each of which provides a set of coordinates with which policy practitioners navigate their accounts of community cohesion policy's development. Each draws on a history of parallel moments and understandings which resonate with contemporary events; each combines a moment or series of moments seen as turning points in the policy's development; and for each, a particular place or group of places have become symbolic of the narrative and its associations. Firstly, the 'origin' of community cohesion is explained as a response to inner city deprivation and ethnic segregation, resulting in a history of 'parallel lives' lived by 'Asian' and 'white' communities in towns in northern England; the turning point of violent disturbances in those towns in 2001 resonates with histories of inner city riots in earlier decades but in this case resulted in government-sponsored reports naming 'community cohesion' – interaction across bounded communities – as a cause of tension (because of its lack) and a prescription for avoiding future problems. Though early responses described isolated communities as 'Asian', subsequent developments related to the international 'war on terror' shifted the conception of the problem to be one of *Muslim* segregation from 'wider society'. This also resulted in a controversial off-shoot of community cohesion policy, the Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) programme, which focused exclusively on preventing Muslims from becoming terrorists, and is explored at length in Chapter Four. Because of the linking of community cohesion policy's origins to reports into the 2001 disturbances, these narratives of segregation and violence are often called up simply by reference to Oldham, Bradford or Burnley, or 'the northern towns'.

The second narrative of community cohesion that I discuss in Chapter Three describes

community cohesion problems associated with another problem group, this time 'the white working class'. I explore how the idea of a 'white backlash', here rhetorically linked to classed exclusion, is linked to mainstream liberal discourses about 'the problems with multiculturalism'. I suggest that these debates, like many of those linked to community cohesion policy, slip between meanings, as 'multiculturalism' comes to symbolise quite different things even among those who oppose it; and that clarity about the difference between multiculture (as a lived experience) and multiculturalism (as a name used to denote a number of ideologies) is often lacking. More recently, this discourse has become associated with electoral successes of the far right racist British National Party (BNP), and this success has largely been attributed to a dissatisfied and neglected 'white working class'. I argue that 'white working class' is problematic as an analytic category because it undermines the solidarity of 'working class' by suggesting that only white people are working class; it confuses understandings of the reasons for exclusion as being associated with ethnicity or race, rather than class; the way the term is used taints those who *do* identify as white and working class as being innately racist or misguided; and importantly, it allows 'the white middle class' to suggest that virulent racism is not their responsibility. In discussions of community cohesion policy, this set of ideas is often signified simply by reference to Barking and Dagenham, the outer London local authority which notoriously elected 12 BNP councillors between 2006 and 2010.

The third narrative in Chapter Three draws on ideas of the British (English) countryside as an innately white and normative symbol of nation, now threatened by immigration. Such images are long-standing, but migration to rural areas increased through the 2000s as a result firstly of the national asylum seeker dispersal programme, and later due to the expansion of the EU and associated arrival of labour migrants. In community cohesion policy narratives, this new migration is seen as quite different to older models of migration from Commonwealth countries, and its scale and speed is seen as challenging local communities and infrastructure which may be unable to cope. Though less associated with a specific place than the earlier two narratives, there are repeated examples of Peterborough being used as an example of a place experiencing this change, and in Chapter Six I explore this association further. The final narrative of



community cohesion policy in this chapter is that of 'super-diversity', that is, the idea of the inner city transformed from a fearful place to a place of opportunity, where ongoing migration and other forms of diversity enhance life rather than harm it, not least in providing opportunities for consumption. In this context, community cohesion policy appears to have less relevance because the sheer complexity of diversity means that groups simply 'rub along' without forming large enough factions to segregate themselves or create tensions. I suggest that Hackney in inner London is often used as an axiomatic example of this ideal of a super-diverse future, but remains haunted by less optimistic histories and their legacies, particularly in terms of economic inequalities. Hackney may be an awkward fit for community cohesion policy, but this in turn makes it a productive site from which to study the negotiations made by policy practitioners in adapting national priorities to local contexts.

In Chapter Four, I enter directly into the world of the policy practitioner in Hackney, drawing on ethnographic data from my experiences as a policy practitioner negotiating the Preventing Violent Extremism programme and its relationship to community cohesion policy. The difficult subjects this negotiation entailed were many: not just the difficulty of the assumption embedded in the PVE programme that all Muslims (and only Muslims) were at risk of becoming terrorists and therefore required special attention but also, importantly, the relationship between central and local government; the ability of local practitioners to determine local problems and solutions; and the role of local government in relation to the police and security services. This chapter demonstrates the work done by practitioners to manage their unease with some policy narratives, by working around and through some of the silences and assumptions of 'official', written presentations of policy documents. My attention to the practices of policy differs from other analyses of PVE and community cohesion policy which have remained at the level of documentary analysis, thereby missing some of the *uses* of policy narratives in practice.

Chapter Five broadens out to consider the governance of place, as experienced and negotiated in Hackney. Place is important to the negotiation of community cohesion policy because it is largely imagined as articulated through local places and place-

identity. The treatment of community cohesion policy as a local solution to local problems can be imagined as a way of evading attention to national and global determinants of inequality which structure relationships at the local level. I consider how policy practitioners in Hackney negotiate the resonant histories and narratives associated with their place, to establish narratives of belonging which try to make sense of local needs, change and futures within the possibilities allowed by power settlements between local and central government and global flows of capital. I explore how efforts to create a sense of place are challenged by local activists who attempt to reveal some of the inequalities of power and control which operate in the making of local place, but who, outside of government, are not subject to the commitments and obligations of policy practitioners. I use theories of branding to demonstrate how the debates about place in Hackney draw on resonant and affective narratives; but I suggest that my case differs from more usual treatments of place-branding, as the struggles I discuss are over the rights to claim an authentic voice of place, rather than simply attempts to sell the place to outsiders.

Chapter Six broadens the consideration of place and brand to engage with three other localities that have become associated with community cohesion policy in the way I suggested in Chapter Three. By engaging with policy practitioners in those three places, I consider how local places are constructed in narrative in opposition to simplified 'elsewheres'. I show how practitioners are aware of how their local areas are treated in this way, and protest about such simplifying frameworks – while they in turn use other places as a similar shorthand. Further, I examine how policy practitioners react to the treatment of their local area as a marker for community cohesion narratives – not necessarily by disputing the narrative outright, but by trying to subvert it. The power of these narratives is such that practitioners do not dismiss them, but use them as an opportunity for rebranding, reworking the attention they gain from a bad community cohesion reputation to showcase their achievements in that field or others. In this case, narrative and brand are being used as a tool within the worlds of local government competition, where places vie for reputational credit as a means of gaining central government approval, funding and recognition as sites of 'good practice'. This competition in the quasi-market of public sector reputation and league

tables is an example of the translation into practice of Third Way governmentality outlined in Chapter One, and as a result the priorities of local authorities are shaped as much by the need to present a positive image in policy worlds (to attract funds and support for initiatives to meet local people's needs) as by locally instigated priorities.

In Chapter Seven, I draw on findings across the thesis which bring us back to the 'governors' themselves. I consider how the difficult subjects of power inequalities and the recognition of the power of simplifying narratives make many policy practitioners uncomfortable, particularly when reflecting on these issues in the research interview. The strategies interviewees used to negotiate these uncomfortable positions varied. I argue that the recognition of systematic discrimination and disadvantage of particular gendered, classed or racialised groups has become embedded in policy worlds to the extent that practitioners often note it almost as a reflex action (as we saw in Rachel's comments above). But the result is not always emancipating. Indeed some interviewees used this starting point to re-establish themselves as privileged (for example, as a middle class heterosexual white man) and therefore 'neutral'. Others, though, reflected on the impossibility of neutrality and what this means for the role of the bureaucrat. Some found community cohesion policy, or associated subjects, difficult to talk about because of the risk of exposure of their own privileged position in society, and many sought to find a more comfortable speaking position by demonstrating how they, too, had somehow been marginalised and therefore could speak authentically about oppression. I close this chapter by suggesting that perhaps the most powerful techniques for speaking about the inequalities and consequent tensions which community cohesion policy (sometimes) tries to address came from those practitioners who recognised their own uncomfortable position but spoke in solidarity with (rather than on behalf of) groups they saw as oppressed.

Finally, Chapter Eight draws the empirical evidence together around four main themes of the thesis, showing how my research presents an original contribution, firstly to understandings of governmentality as *process*, by examining the negotiations of policy in practice (the conduct of the conduct of conduct) and how governors themselves are also subject to processes of governmentality and self-regulation. Secondly, I discuss

how the construction of narratives, what they allow to be said and what is silenced, can have the effect of masking power relations. In the case of community cohesion policy, I discuss how my research demonstrates that attempts to expose and address inequality can be reincorporated into narratives, silencing attempts at more progressive imaginings of society. Thirdly, I demonstrate how the role and functioning of local government is a difficult subject in itself, an often unspoken subject of struggle in the negotiations I have mapped, and that this constant questioning of what local government should be, or is, able to do – a mixture of promise and frustration – creates uncomfortable positions for policy practitioners working within it. Finally, I argue that the thesis has shown how the linking of individual moments and relationships (often experienced through emotion) and societal power structures is not limited to the imaginations of sociologists or academics. I argue that many policy practitioners encountered in this research made such links, but that their role was not simply to develop such understandings, but to attempt to *use* them in the negotiation and exercise of power. As my research shows, doing so is not easy or comfortable. It is often navigated through the use of narratives that draw on unspoken resonances and affective reactions. Developing, interpreting and using such narratives is a skill in itself. The importance of understanding the power of emotion in policy is not so much about emotion as an output of policy, or an abdication of attention to material relations. Rather, it is about understanding how material relations of power are mediated *through* personal relationships and emotional reactions, and that to influence power inequalities it is necessary to understand such emotional resonances.

## **Chapter One: Difficult Subjects**

### ***Introduction***

There are contradictions within community cohesion policy, but how are these negotiated? They are not instigated by a monolithic state, but developed, argued over, manipulated, translated and refracted through multiple exchanges between individuals and organisations. Thinking about how these contradictions are negotiated and used opens up aspects of knowledge about processes of government, and provides new ways to understand or challenge such policies, how they come to be and what their consequences might be.

In this thesis I do not set out to address the efficacy or application of community cohesion policy (for which see e.g. Cheshire, 2007; Hudson et al, 2007; Muir, 2008); to provide a theoretical basis for ideals of community cohesion, justifications for developing it as a programme of government, or the evaluation of its application (for which see e.g. Cattle, 2005; Ratcliffe and Newman, 2011; Wetherell et al, 2007). Nor do I intend the thesis as a normative critique of community cohesion policy discourse; a literature on this already exists where the assumptions, methods and findings of community cohesion policy and its supporting research have been systematically critiqued (e.g. Ben-Tovim, 2002; McGhee, 2003, 2005; Burnett, 2004, 2007; Worley, 2005).

My research is a study not of community cohesion policy, but of the processes through which it is shaped and enacted. There are three aspects to this: 1) understanding that government or the state is not monolithic, and is itself made up of people, institutions and practices (Foucault, 1991 [1978]:103); 2) understanding how people act as agents of change in producing, negotiating and translating policies of governmentality; and 3) recognising that such people are themselves subject to governing processes (both as everyday citizens and within the professional context).

I use community cohesion policy as the example for this research because this focus 1) relates to questions such as community and responsibility which are central to 'governmentality'; 2) highlights the importance of the practice and use of discourse through community cohesion's shifting and unstable meaning, and the questions that relevant policy statements leave unresolved; and 3) creates space for attempts to engage with the changing context of larger themes including the nature of society, identity, inequality, migration and belonging. Community cohesion policy, like many other policy ideas, is overdetermined – in the sense that it is determined many times over, by different readings at different times by different individuals in different contexts; 'by memory, by meaning, by social relations' (Pile, 2005:12).

The emergence of the concept of 'community cohesion' is not a single, straightforward path to trace. Ideas merge and filter through numerous lineages, unions and resonances (Osborne and Rose, 1999: 384). In this chapter I will explore the rationale for looking at the ways these resonances are expressed and used within everyday contexts of governing. By engaging with policy practitioners and their reflections on the processes of governing, I uncover how sociological imaginations are used in public spheres; and perhaps the potential for this to be developed. In doing so, I try to both demystify the practice of government and understand how complex its operation, at the micro-level, can be.

This approach builds on what Rose describes as 'analytics of government', seeking to 'diagnose an array of lines of thought, of will, of invention, of programmes and failures, of acts and counter-acts' (1999b:21). Rose describes this type of study as concerned with 'regimes of truth' or 'regimes of enunciation'; not interested in identifying essential authorial intentions, but in examining what is said, by whom, how it is said, and with what authority. This is a field of struggle, change and flux:

It is not so much a question of what a word or a text 'means'... but of analysing the way a word or a book functions in connection with other things, what it makes possible, the surfaces, networks and circuits around which it flows, the affects and passions that it mobilizes and through which it mobilizes (1999b:29).

While Rose's work examines not just texts but these relationships between texts, actions and contexts, his approach is historical, and therefore much of the empirical data he investigates are printed or physical documents or secondary literature, much as in the work of Michel Foucault. My research aims to get closer to the living, usually unrecorded elements of government, by engaging with the reflections of individuals working with and producing the kind of documentation that historians might later find to analyse. In the process, of course, I make these reflections into texts; I will discuss further the status I give to this data in Chapter Two. At this point I want to establish that my approach is an understanding of processes of governmentality in action and in production, which builds on existing governmentality theory but takes a more immediate approach – and engages with individuals at once governed and governing.

In this chapter I will first explain my object of study (how government is conducted) and the thinking behind this theoretical approach, building on understandings of governmentality first articulated by Michel Foucault, and particularly as elaborated on by Nikolas Rose. I will consider existing sociological work on community cohesion policy in the context of New Labour government in Britain, and explain how my attention to the negotiation of policy by practitioners adds to this literature. I will suggest how considering affect in processes of government will help to develop an understanding of ethico-politics in practice. Finally, I will reflect on how emotion and affect are instrumentalised through narratives attached to place, and the organisation of these emotions into competitive performance measures within the logic of governing through governmentality.

### ***The sociological imagination and ethico-politics***

Community cohesion policy is formed by multiple resonances, not least the relationship between two sometimes apparently separate, but usually interpenetrating worlds – on the one hand academic theory and research, on the other policy makers

and practitioners. Of course these 'two worlds' are not internally homogeneous and they do not operate separately from one another. In this chapter I trace some of the influences and confluences in and between them, and in doing so explore the context for the emergence of community cohesion policy to consider how those echoes and influences work in action.

This research is an exploration of the sociological imagination (Mills, 1999 [1959]) outside the academy. More recent debates about the reach of sociology beyond the university were given impetus by a speech to the American Sociological Association (ASA)'s annual conference in 2004 by its President, Michael Burawoy (2004). Burawoy's gist was that sociological insights should be made available to the public and that this may involve political and ethical (or in his term, 'moral') engagement. I share Burawoy's desire to promote engaged sociological thinking in the world. What I find problematic is his characterisation of the practice of sociological research, and his compartmentalisation of public engagement within his vision of the discipline's interactions with the rest of the world (reservations also noted by others e.g. Brady, 2004; Calhoun, 2005; Tittle, 2004). In particular, the move to a discussion of 'public sociology' loses some of the power that thinking with a 'sociological imagination' can offer (see also Back, 2007b).

Burawoy describes four types of sociology: professional sociology, policy sociology, critical sociology and public sociology (2004:1607). Policy and public sociology both have audiences outside the academy, but while policy sociology is concerned with instrumental knowledge, public sociology is concerned with reflexive knowledge. Policy sociology is accountable to clients or patrons (such as the state, businesses or NGOs), while public sociology is accountable only to 'designated publics'. The risk of policy sociology is 'servility', while the pathology of public sociology is 'faddishness'. Policy sociology is about doing, whereas public sociology is about thinking. What government (in the sense of 'the state') uses is policy sociology; public sociology (and therefore reflexive use of sociological ideas) is reserved for civil society. Alongside policy and public sociologies sit professional and critical sociology, which reproduce the instrumental/reflexive knowledge distinction within the academy.



Burawoy concedes that there is not a watertight distinction between his types of sociology, and that each is internally complex, and may be practised by the same sociologist over time (or at once). He acknowledges too that there are variations in how the disciplinary field is constructed in different national contexts, whereas he is speaking specifically to a US audience. Even accepting this qualification for the sake of argument, there are problems. The key concern for my current discussion is the assumption that the use of sociology by the state will be necessarily unreflexive or even malign (Brady, 2004:1634-5).

In my view, an important goal of public sociology should be making the means for discussions that question power relations and their workings available in *all* realms of society (see also Back, 2007b:114). Dialogue and questioning are envisaged as central to sociology in Mills' conception of the sociological imagination as:

a quality of mind that will help [people] to use information and to develop reason in order to achieve lucid summations of what is going on in the world and of what may be happening within themselves. (1999 [1959]:5)

and

the capacity to shift from one perspective to another... to range from the most impersonal and remote transformation to the most intimate features of the human self – and to see the relations between the two. (1999 [1959]:7)

In this thesis I want to think about how this public sociology, or sociological imagination, works within the structures of government and policy-making. It is important to recognise not only that non-sociologists sometimes think in similar ways to sociologists, but also that in some cases it is not so easy to draw a distinction between who is 'a sociologist' and who is not (Farrar, 2008), and that sociological theories and ideas can be translated and re-inflected outside the academy with or without the academy's 'consent'. There is potential to intervene in different ways if we

feel that sociology is being misunderstood or misapplied; but in doing so we should recognise that non-professional sociologists have their own insights and expertise – for example, thinking about how other, perhaps more radical, forms of sociology could be transformed into practical tools for use within governing and policy, or challenging government and policy.

Quite different approaches to understanding policy and government have been taken by many working in political science, public administration or state theory. My work is distinct from much of the traditional study of government and governing in three main ways: 1) political science traditions tend to focus on national rather than local scales, and on institutions rather than people; 2) their approaches to knowledge production are largely descriptive and/or prescriptive of institutional models and abstraction; and 3) they tend to have an opacity about research methods, allied to these understandings of government as institutional, abstract, and perfectible. In this institutional focus, local government studies can appear to operate without people or places – the stuff of social interaction. Following others (Back, 2007b:160-163; Burnett and Duncan, 2008; Keith, 2008b), I begin from an understanding of government, governing and policy-making as messy, unruly and contingent, involving *people* and happening in *places*.

There is a preoccupation with macro-scales in the work on British government, with much more interest in national than local government (Jessop, 2003:108-9; Rhodes, 1988). This is replicated in the study of local government, where a substantial body of literature focuses on the relationships between *institutions*, while neglecting the *people* who make up those institutions (e.g. Jones, 1995; Rhodes, 1988:46; Stoker, 2004; Wolman, 1995) – despite occasional case studies of specific individuals in leadership positions (e.g. Gains, 1995:92). This treatment of government as best understood at large scales can also be seen in Jessop's reading of Foucault to understand 'micro-power' as a 'perspective' which can be applied to 'the global strategies of the state' (Jessop, 2007:39), without necessarily requiring an engagement with interactions on a micro level. Even where attempting to discuss relationships, negotiations and partnerships, there remains a tendency to treat institutions (or parts

of institutions, or professions, or even 'the public') as if they think and act as one (e.g. Rhodes, 1988:46-7; Stoker, 2004:79).

Perhaps as a result, such studies describe institutional relations and functions in abstract terms, and/or prescribe alternative models. Questions of whether central control of local government is too hierarchical, of whether local government is run efficiently, and of the distinction between *government* and *governance* tend to dominate this literature (Hood, 1991, 1998; Pyper and Robins, 2000; Stewart, 2003; Stoker, 2004:168; Wolman, 1995). Some writers in this school have recognised that such abstractions can be far removed from real interactions between people in government – yet their subsequent attempts to 'put people back in' to such models within political science frameworks tend to start from the model, attempting to amend it to fit observations, rather than beginning with empirical experiences (Dunleavy, 1991:259; Hood, 1998; Rhodes, 1997, 2002).

These epistemological starting points lead to tendency towards research methods connected to historical and legal approaches, that is, largely using archival and documentary sources – perhaps with interviews and observations – but with a general lack of attention to the provenance of data (e.g. Stoker, 2004:78; Stone, 1995). An apparent cultural turn has provoked some attention to ethnographic methods from previously more traditional researchers (e.g. Rhodes, 2002); but the debates between Bevir and Rhodes (2008) and Marsh (2008a, 2008b) over epistemology and methodology suggest that political scientists may gain from a more interdisciplinary approach and a greater familiarity with the type of sociological perspective explored in this thesis. More recent interest in citizen engagement (e.g. Brannan et al, 2007) may have broadened understandings of the object of study to consider individual actors, but most studies continue to favour a focus on individuals *interacting with*, rather than *constituting* government or the state (Hunter, 2003). Similarly, recognition that there may be messiness or reflexivity within processes of policy and governing tend to be limited to asking whether policy practitioners understand that policies may 'fail', rather than questioning whether or how practitioners negotiate and constitute the meanings and practices of policy (and its success or failure) (e.g. Jessop, 2003:110; Stoker,

2004:1).

These criticisms of political economy approaches to the study of government should not suggest that there have not been other studies of local government practice which engage with policy practitioners, and contextualise their practice. There is a literature which uses a less embedded ethnographic methodology but still accounts for local government practice without the political economist tendency to attempt to build predictive models from the findings (e.g. Boddy and Fudge, 1984; Lansley et al, 1989). Likewise, a body of work applying a more ethnographic lens to local government through interviewing and observation of policy practitioners exists, largely focused around particular issues such as race relations (e.g. Ben-Tovim et al, 1986; Solomos and Back, 1995; Young and Connelly, 1981). More recently, critical sociologists have extended this work to engage with government practitioners' negotiations of their own identities within practices of governance, though largely focusing on specific professions such as social workers or politicians (Hunter, 2003, 2004; Mayo et al, 2007; Puwar, 1997, 2001, 2004; Lewis, 2000). My work adds to this literature by understanding the relationship between individual negotiations and wider power structures through the experiences and reflections of practitioners who are at once responsible for governing, but often feel their power is limited; by both understanding this relationship through a sociological imagination and reflecting on how practitioners themselves negotiate policy with an understanding of the connections between the personal and the structural.

In the process of my research, the understandings of social problems that participants expressed were rarely described with explicit reference to social theorists or theories (though sometimes they were). They were very often inflected by them though, either by 'folk sociologies' (Sayer, 2005:20) or by half-remembered insights from books, radio, television or newspapers – or policy documents and conferences. Occasionally, participants would express frustration at the limits of the models at their disposal for understanding the complex social problems we were discussing. They would often describe the workings of government in pragmatic, ethnographic terms that emphasised the everyday and contingent, alongside their presentation of the formal

model of how governing is supposed to work. They would provide their own theorisations about these forms of cognitive dissonance.

If the policy practitioners I interviewed could see a lack in the means that were available for describing social problems; if they were very articulate in noting the language games of policy process and policy discourses; if they came to very similar conclusions to many (albeit more rigorously argued and evidenced) academic papers on the subject; were they not using sociological imaginations, practising public sociology? And more pressingly, if they could see these dissonances, how did they deal with them? How did these policy practitioners practice, to varying extents, a form of public sociology?

It is useful to think about the practice of policy through the lens of governmentality and ethico-politics. Rose (1999b) uses the term 'ethico-politics' to consider government in the context of re-thinking the world beyond previous schematics of easily divisible and mechanical workings of discrete nation states, to take account of new flows, challenges and undercurrents (p2). In this less certain world, a

new ethical politics... refuses the idea that politics is a matter of state, parliament, election and party programme... demanding that individuals, families, communities, employers take back to themselves the powers and responsibilities that... have been acquired by states, politicians and legislators (pp.2-3).

The communitarian turn Rose characterises as dominating ethico-political trends attempts to counter this uncertainty by referring to a common core of shared values.

This core can thus form the basis of an ethico-politics which overcomes the contradiction between the need to respect autonomy and diversity on the one hand, and the need for some basis for authoritative judgements of good and bad, right and wrong, on the other (p.170).

This is a politics with rising demands from all points on the political spectrum for

control to be removed from the state to the level of the individual, family or community, who take responsibility for making (the right) decisions about their lives. Whereas bio-politics used disciplinary power to maximise the physical health and welfare of populations of docile individuals, ethico-politics uses culture and consumption to encourage moral self-government by individuals. This depends on autonomy of the individual, while reinforcing norms (the 'shared core' of values) that strongly encourage individuals to behave in a certain way, to produce beneficial outcomes. Ethico-politics 'individualizes and normalizes', by developing the 'self-techniques necessary for responsible self-government' (p. 188). But the sharing of norms and responsibilities, couched in an appeal to a morality of 'community', does not eliminate the possibility for tension, or the need to negotiate the diversity and difference of individuals in a population (p. 170).

This central appeal to 'community' is one obvious reason for treating community cohesion as an exemplar of ethico-political interventions. The ethico-politics described by Rose attempts to treat individual choices about one's life as technical decisions, for which there are measurable pros and cons; and where ethical and moral judgements about the costs and benefits to oneself and to others are based on these measurable criteria. By looking at the way community cohesion policy is negotiated, we can consider how the cross-over between private and public ethical responsibilities are played out by individuals working within the traditional forms of the state. To devise and to practice ethico-political interventions involves some level of sociological imagination, some analytical consideration of the relations between individual and society.

The pattern of individualisation and normalisation is replicated in professional as well as personal life. In institutions of government, professional expertise is increasingly subject to the managerial techniques of audit (Power, 1999), while the doctrine of 'double devolution' (Miliband, 2006) professes an increased freedom for local government from central government control (and for residents' groups from local government) – so long as contractual and audit requirements are met.<sup>3</sup> These

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<sup>3</sup> What will become of this agenda under the rubric of 'The Big Society' promoted by the coalition

phenomena are exemplified in the development of community cohesion policy: a formula intended to produce measurable and accountable results, while having moral force; which is spoken of as needing to fit local circumstances, and to be nationally comparable; and where the relationship between individuals and society is mediated by an appeal to community (e.g. COIC, 2007:4-5).

If community cohesion is achieved through individual and group behaviours, then the task of organisations and policies of government is simply to enable individuals and groups to make the proper ethical decisions which will enable cohesion. Trevor Phillips, as Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality, suggested that 'integration is a learned competence – like maths or driving a car' (Phillips, 2005). If integration (closely associated with the language of cohesion) is simply a skill or craft to be learned, then the task of government is to provide the means to learn; the responsibility of citizens is to learn and apply this skill. The following extract from a Home Office cohesion strategy exemplifies this approach:

This strategy is also about looking beyond opportunities for individuals, to the importance of strengthening society. *This is not something that the Government can do alone*, but it is an issue on which we can give a lead: *helping people come together* from different backgrounds; *supporting people to contribute* to society; and taking a stand against racism and extremists who promote hatred (Home Office, 2005b:5, my emphasis).

Here, the role of government is to 'help' and 'support' people to make the right choices and to behave in an appropriate way. People are expected to do this not (only) for their individual benefit, but for the good of society; but their responsibility for doing so is an individual responsibility. The normative behaviours are specified by the state, but ensuring they are followed is an individual ethical responsibility. This ethico-politics is a form of thinking that has come to be associated in Britain with the 'New Labour

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government from 2010 remains to be seen at the time of writing. The ethico-political trend of responsibilisation seems likely to continue or increase, but it is unclear how the element of audit, management and measurement by experts will develop as the government's ambition to shrink the state proceeds (see Chapter Eight for more reflections on this).

project'.

### ***Governmentality and New Labour***

Community cohesion has been very much a New Labour concept (Burnett, 2007; Thompson, 2002; Szreter, 1999; Schofield, 2002). The Third Way approach championed by Anthony Giddens ('Blair's favourite intellectual' (Richards, 2005)) favours social democracy over socialism or liberalism; pragmatism over ideology; and populism over redistribution (Temple, 2000; Lister, 2001). It is a project which situated itself at the supposed 'end of history' (Fukuyama, 1992), where the end of the Cold War apparently signalled a future without enemies of liberal democracy. As a consequence, the political project associated with Tony Blair in the UK and Bill Clinton in the USA declared the failure of state socialism and the need to regulate capitalism. This could, and has been, represented as 'post-Thatcherite' politics (Giddens, 2000:8), yet the defining element of New Labour politics seems to be that there is not an unambiguous core, but an ambivalence in policy and rhetoric; an approach that was key to its electoral success, but has also provoked criticism (Back et al, 2002; Beynon and Kushnick, 2003; Gilroy, 2001; Hall, 1998; Lister, 2001; Solomos, 2003:89). This ambiguity relates directly to the ethico-political contradiction of the obligation to be free within a market-led framework (Rose, 1999b:83); the opportunity to make one's own choices but to be punished if these choices are not in line with political and policy aspirations.

In bringing together these forms of managerialism, measurement of performance intended to value equality, and empowerment of local people and communities, the New Labour government presented itself as enabling a populist and progressive consensus (Blair, 2002). It is unsurprising that this concern for consensus emerged in a context where the 'end of history' thesis suggested that there was no longer room for ideological conflict. This approach discounted the complexity of politics as struggle, despite the new social movements and persistence of ideological conflict that have



become much more difficult to ignore in the light of international global protest, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the 'war on terror' more generally (Mayo, 2005). The challenges that this still tumultuous world presents provoke new attempts at communitarian solutions, such as those of community cohesion policy or social capital theory.

This form of government has called on sociological expertise, but perhaps more the form of policy sociology described in Burawoy's typology than the public sociology dialogue or sociological imagination that might leave room for questioning or uncertainty. There are limitations to this literature in terms of theoretical coherence and practical application or efficacy. Why, then, has it been so influential? There are three explanations for this. Firstly, it has gained prominence and respectability at least in part from its over-citation in the academic literature which criticises its shortcomings (Fine, 2001:191). Secondly, its scientific nature and use of numbers make it appear credible, reliable and tested. Finally, its apparently broad scope and claim to explain all manner of problems and prescribe their solution make it accessible and practical for policy practitioners to use.

The last of these claims is the most relevant here. Anthony Giddens famously produced a number of texts proposing to lay the intellectual foundations of Third Way politics. Key elements of this philosophy are a belief in market mechanisms not as counter to social and economic equality, but necessary to it (when tempered by regulation) (Giddens, 2000:164). The regulation of markets in the name of social responsibility goes alongside a similar restraint required from individuals – Giddens suggests 'no rights without responsibilities' should be a central motto for this form of politics (Giddens, 1998:65). This link between the rights and responsibilities of individuals and government, the right to increased autonomy in return for conducting oneself within limits of behaviour, has been characterised as 'responsibilisation', a central element to governmentality or the conduct of conduct (Burchell, 1996:29). It is exemplified in the Third Way emphasis on investment in human capital, coupled with the expectation that this will be re-invested in the economy either through the labour market or through (specific forms of) domestic labour (Giddens, 2000:165-6). Finally, a preoccupation

with 'common sense' concerns of populations, namely crime and family life, are seen not only as electorally important but as the core of the 'shared values' that underpin national 'community'. The Third Way philosophy insists that these preoccupations can form a progressive political project when tied into the rights-responsibility link described above (Giddens, 2000:166).

The increasing use of concepts such as 'community' as both a rhetorical technique and a way of shaping processes of governing has been a particular focus of sociological attention, and one that is of course important to a study of community cohesion policy. As Schofield puts it, 'the very attractiveness of community to policymakers lies in its ambiguous potential' (2002:679-80). Inherent in these policies is an understanding of community as a seemingly fundamental social and historical concept, which can be 'allowed too easily to become an explanation rather than something to be explained' (Alleyne, 2002). Levitas points out that the concept's popularity has increased in academia as well as in government, with a similar lack of conceptual clarity (2005:89).

For Rose, 'community' has become a central lever in the Third Way of governing, as a point linking

the powers of a territory between the authority of the state, the free and amoral exchange of the market and the liberty of the autonomous, 'rights-bearing' individual subject (1999b:167).

For example, Levitas observes that 'community involvement' is often used as a condition of state support for poorer areas, so that the requirement to *create* 'community' becomes a form of government at a distance (2005:199).

The development of community as an object of policy has been parallel to, and in part reliant on, the rise of social capital as theoretical concept and policy tool (see e.g. Cattle, 2005: 186). A number of theorists have taken up the idea of social capital, in various forms (e.g. Coleman, 1988), but many have shed the sense of capital with an exchange value. In Robert Putnam's (2000) consideration of social capital, issues of

trust and well-being are central; issues of power and economic relations largely absent. Putnam's thesis is that 'social capital' consists of reciprocal, informal relationships such as participation in civil society organisations. He suggests that more time spent watching television and using computers, changing patterns of residence and work and family life (particularly women's increased involvement in paid employment), and the increasing diversity in society have led to a reduction in these ties, but that health, wealth and happiness can be increased by participation in voluntary groups.<sup>4</sup> Putnam elaborates on this to describe two types of social capital – 'bonding' capital is the ties within a distinct community; 'bridging' capital makes links between distinct communities; too much bonding capital without bridging capital, it is suggested, can lead to fragmentation and a lack of cohesion (Putnam, 2000:362).

Ben Fine (1999; 2001) describes social capital as a 'conceptual fad' (2001:195). He argues that the social component of all capital has been traditionally neglected by mainstream economics, only to attempt to 'put the social back in' through a rational choice model which ignores real social complexity and tensions, or which attempts to explain such complexities through tidy mathematical equations. DeFillipis, meanwhile, suggests that Putnam's version of social capital neglects the role of the *economic* in social relationships, with Bourdieu's version more useful in this regard (2001:783). Some accounts of social capital have emphasised the importance of networks without recognising that some networks will give access to more economic capital than others. To address this power differential would require confrontation, but this is elided in Putnam's simplistic conception, which suggests that the supply of social capital could potentially be increased indefinitely so that everyone has more. DeFillipis concludes that, if social capital is to have an exchange value like other forms of capital, this can only be realised by virtue of the fact that some people have it while others do not (2001:801).

Bourdieu describes the relationship between economic capital, cultural capital and

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Putnam's website [www.bowlingalone.com](http://www.bowlingalone.com) which includes a number of 'factoids' including the following: 'Joining and participating in one group cuts in half your odds of dying next year'.

social capital and argues that capital 'amounts to the same thing' as power (Bourdieu, 1986:243). Cultural capital can be embodied as a disposition for learning, behaviour or values; objectified in the form of cultural goods; or institutionalised in the form of educational qualifications. Social capital 'is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to... membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital' (1986:248-9). Both social capital and cultural capital are created through labour and are exchangeable for each other or for economic capital and, Bourdieu argues, should be considered in order to form a full understanding of the reproduction of capital and power relations. This notion of social capital as embedded in power relations tends to become lost in the interpretations of the model more often used in policy development.

The early critiques of community cohesion policy began with a similar critique to the arguments over social capital laid out above: describing and participating in the struggle for meaning, pointing out the neglect of power relations in the way that theories of community cohesion were being developed, and identifying inconsistencies in the policy, its practice and its identified subject matter. These critiques show that the ideal of 'shared values' with which it appears easy to agree, can actually stand for a multitude of shifting meanings. These variances include the disjuncture between a focus on cohesion and a repressive criminal justice response, particularly to young Muslim men (Bagguley and Hussain, 2003a; McGhee, 2005); the association of cohesion policy with migration, and latterly with terrorism (Cheong et al, 2007; Husband and Alam, 2011); inconsistent attention to the social and economic factors underpinning unrest (Burnett, 2007; McGhee, 2003); the de-racialising and re-racialising effects of 'community' discourse and the implications of cohesion discourse for the construction of gender and family (Worley, 2005); and the assumption that consensus will always be a positive goal, that communities or identities are static and bounded, and that any of these questions can be separated from struggles over power and disadvantage (Alexander, 2004; Cheong et al, 2007).

Derek McGhee, for example, notes the essentially sociological nature of problematising and managing relations between individuals, communities and society that community

cohesion projects entail (2003:376). Jonathan Burnett suggests that the creation of problems and specification of their solutions in the development of community cohesion policy relies heavily on

emotive sentiment or emotionalism [which] legitimises an extension of state governance, the practice of which both alienates and stigmatises those against whom it is targeted (Burnett, 2004:1).

The focus of both Burnett's and McGhee's research is the alienation and stigmatisation they see arising from these practices of governing. While these political *outcomes* are important, at the risk of repeating myself, I want to emphasise that my research is about the *functioning* of the practices that can reproduce these forms of government (or not). It is about the power and practice of sociological imagination. It is also about ambiguity – again, not just enumerating the ambiguities that exist in discourses of community cohesion, but how they function in practice. The importance of ambiguities of language in community cohesion policy in particular have also been covered elsewhere:

whilst the concept of 'community' is highly ambiguous, it has continuing resonance in New Labour policymaking. The concept of 'community' has particular implications for processes of race and gender. Talking about 'communities' enables language to become deracialized, whilst at the same time the language of community cohesion draws upon earlier discourses of assimilation through notions of 'integration' (Worley, 2005:483).

Worley points out how the power of ambiguity at once dismisses and recreates divisions of race and gender, again noting how sociological categories are part of constructing as well as understanding community cohesion policy. Worley's reference to 'integration' here is also telling. She treats the term as over-determined by homogenising discourses of assimilation, but others prefer it to cohesion as a better way of recognising the two-way (at least) process of bringing together different groups (Spencer, 2011).

The use and power of language in re-imagining and reinforcing social categories has also been explored in relation to Third Way politics more generally. Bourdieu and Wacquant point out that the terms in which the politics of governmentality are couched are such that clarity of thinking is obscured. Such language

tends to mask the historical roots of a whole set of questions and notions: the efficiency of the (free) market, the need for recognition of (cultural) 'identities' or the celebratory reassertion of (individual) 'responsibility' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2001).

That essay provided a critique of the internationally significant emergence of neoliberal moralism over the last decades of the twentieth century. Similar analyses have also been made specifically of the 'New Labour Project' in Britain by a range of authors (e.g. Fairclough, 2000; Levitas 2005; Wetherell, 2008; Kalra, 2002; Back et al, 2002), including Stuart Hall:

One of the core reasons for the 'Third Way's semantic inexactitude - measured by the promiscuous proliferation of such troubling adverbs as 'between', 'above' and 'beyond' - is its efforts to be all-inclusive. It has no enemies. Everyone can belong. (1998:10)

Such analyses demonstrate the importance of language to the framing of understandings of society within government; to the problematisation of aspects of life as questions requiring solutions; and to the creation and use of particular tools and technologies to effect these solutions.

The practicality of the (policy) sociology used to support Third Way political projects and forms of government is in large part related to language. The language of social capital and of community, the projects it makes possible and impossible, the concepts it releases and silences are parallel with what is thinkable within and for government (Bourdieu, 1977 [1972]:164). Despite its tendency to confuse description and

explanation and to consider a concept like 'community' to be both a goal in itself and a solution to most other ills (Rose, 1999b:179-80), the strand of sociology which provides the basis for community cohesion and related policies has been extremely influential.

In response to this tendency, Newman and Clarke (2009:185-6) call for the re-articulation of concepts like 'public', 'equality', 'bureaucracy' and 'welfare' as a way of nourishing counter-discourses towards an egalitarian form of publicness. They argue that such counter-discourses take on the undertones and genealogies that undercut many of these terms, in a more effective way than simply rejecting a term such as 'diversity' because it has become discredited by some politically problematic usage. In my data, I will explore the extent to which such counter-discourses co-exist, refract and re-interpret existing meanings and echoes, in the everyday negotiations of policy practitioners.

Simply identifying the contradictions and ambiguities of language in policy seems to limit the possibilities for sociological imagination to have influence in the public sphere. The existing literature on community cohesion policy which provides this kind of analysis does not tell us very much about how alternative worlds might be imagined (or brought into being). It seems to me that there is space for an analysis which considers how and why such ambiguous and problematic policies and theories are influential, which considers the functioning of power and agency at a micro-level, recognising that government is not a single and coherently functioning entity, but a set of processes, interactions, factions and individuals (Keith, 2008b; Mayo et al, 2007).

This thesis will explore these elements of ethical struggle where they appear in the formation of community cohesion policy, not only in textual artefacts but in the translation and negotiation of discourse and practice. While existing academic critiques do acknowledge these tensions, in the main they neglect the process of negotiating them. This is where my thesis explores new territory.

### ***The conduct of the conduct of conduct***

Having set out my understanding of governmentality as a technique of power, I want to consider the specific practices it involves. Most writing in this area focuses on ways that citizens are subject to state power, and how they conduct themselves in response to regimes of governmentality. There is less existing research on the ways that individuals are implicated in *creating* regimes of governmentality to govern others.

Rose recognises that the rise of ethical discourse in politics could be an opportunity to challenge the supposed objectivity of what are deemed scientific or rational choices, but there are points where 'the vocabulary of ethics actually operates to impose a different but no less motivated and directive politics of conduct' (1999b:192). A more radical form of ethico-politics would recognise a constant struggle and re-evaluation of norms and values; an 'agonistic politics of ethics' (1999b:194; see also Mouffe's call for an 'ethics of the political' (2005:113)). This is particularly significant as conflict and pluralism are inherent in both the objects of community cohesion policy – the problems it is supposed to work on – and in the formation and perpetuation of policy.

The developing field of psycho-social welfare studies attempts to introduce feminist perspectives on the importance of affect and attachment to questions of power and knowledge (Barnes, 2008; Scanlon and Adlam, 2008; Stenner et al, 2008). This goes beyond the treatment of 'happiness' as a quantifiable social good (e.g. Layard, 2005) to consider the interdependence of materiality and affect, in some cases directly challenging the assumptions of more influential studies. For example, Hoggett (2001) challenges Giddens' celebration of the possibilities of rational choice by highlighting how choices can be made in 'urgent and contingent encounters' (p40), in which 'our capacity to be a reflexive agent is often constrained by the difficulties we have in facing our own fears and anxieties' (p42). Hoggett's description of constrained reflexivity seems to imply that the reflexive agent would be a rational one; the emotional decisions we make because of fear and anxiety are not what would be in our best rational interests. He goes on to consider



whether the notion of the 'reflexive self' is not itself gendered, expressing an essentially masculine experience of autonomy in contrast to a concept of a 'relational self' in which self cannot be understood except in its relation to other (p45).

By considering the importance of emotion in decision-making, we may therefore be better able to consider the ethical dimension of relations to others that more scientific accounts seem to remove. This is an articulation of social theory which has not penetrated the practice of governing anywhere near as effectively as the work of, for example, Putnam or Giddens.

There is of course a risk that the psycho-social welfare literature could obscure the relationships of dependence and commitment between the self and others through a focus on a sovereign, autonomous, self-realising subject of 'the psy disciplines' (Rose, 1999a). But there is room for nuance, whereby this literature opens up a space for considering affect as a relationship between the individual and the other. This does not necessarily lead to the pursuit of the (measurable and always improvable) happiness of the sovereign subject. It can lead instead to an understanding of an ongoing interaction in which multiple echoes, meanings and re-inflections are possible, including multiple reactions within the self as well as between selves (e.g. see Hoggett, 2001:45). The impetus of writers defining the field of psycho-social welfare is to rethink welfare and well-being together, rather than drifting into the pop-psychology of well-being (Stenner et al, 2008).

My empirical approach is similar to that described retrospectively by Miller and Rose's reflections on their own engagements with social research through the lens of governmentality:

Instead of writing the history of the self or of subjectivity, we would study the history of individuals' *relations* with themselves and with others, the practices which both were their correlate and condition of possibility, and enabled these relations to be acted upon. Not who they were, but who they thought they were,

what they wanted to be, the languages and norms according to which they judged themselves and were judged by others, the actions they took upon themselves and that others might take, in the light of those understandings (Rose and Miller, 2008:7, original emphasis).

By concentrating on the 'how' not the 'why' of governing (Foucault, 1982:217), I consider the people who work within and make up institutions of government, rather than the institutions themselves. I consider the practices by which such individuals make sense of their decisions, activities and responsibilities and the frameworks of thought and practice that they use to do so. I do this by considering discourse in practice, that is, the use, modification, negotiation, acceptance and re-inflection of discourses in everyday talk (albeit largely in interview situations).

If governmentality is concerned with the conduct of conduct – guiding others as to how to conduct themselves (Foucault, 1982:221) – then what this thesis confronts is *the conduct of the conduct of conduct* – how people *practice* guiding others as to how to conduct themselves. The majority of the empirical data I will discuss relates to the negotiations that policy practitioners make when explaining and exploring how they interpret, recreate or subvert programmes of governmentality; how they construct and consider their roles in doing so across their 'private' and 'public' identities; and how in so doing they negotiate, develop and question that boundary. This is done, of course, in the context of a series of active discourses about governing, ways to govern, ideals of government, and the purposes of governing.

Through the thesis I will develop this understanding of the importance of affective elements of governing, to consider its implications for the conduct of the conduct of conduct. The body of work on emotion in the workplace (e.g. Fineman, 2000; Hochschild, 1983; Greco and Stenner, 2008) looks at the relationship between individual and organisation, but not at how senior individuals in organisations relate emotionally to their powers to change that organisation or its effects. In contrast, the existing literature on psycho-social approaches to welfare focus largely on the welfare recipient; on how 'the "weight" of welfare provision becomes a matter of individual

responsibility, choice and desire' (Stenner et al, 2008:421). There is less attention to the affective dimension of governing from *within* the governing organisation (Barnes, 2008:477; though see Hunter, 2003 and 2005; Lewis, 2000; Lipsky, 1980; Mayo et al, 2007). The existing literature on the 'public sector ethos' (du Gay, 2000; Hoggett et al, 2006; Le Grand, 2003) considers one element of this, an element traditionally thought of as about impartiality of service delivery and equality of citizenship rights.

How far then has the growing emphasis on responsibilisation altered this service provider role? If the subject of welfare or government is constructed as an self-creating individual, how do those governing them conceive of their own role? Not forgetting that they are, at the same time as governing, subject to governance themselves – or *do* they forget this? I want to consider how the government of individuals' emotional and affective responses as individuals, as political subjects and citizens, as simultaneously clients of the state, employees of the state, and decision-makers within the state, shape and are shaped by their practices of government. In doing so, I want to make visible the ethical and political choices that sit within and alongside the bureaucratic (Mayo et al, 2007; see also Lewis, 2000).

### ***Imagining places***

As well as working on themselves, policy practitioners seek to find comfortable, or at least authoritative, positions from which to speak. Unsurprisingly, much of the claim to authenticity within practices of *local* government concerned connections to, narratives about, and knowledge of local places. At a general level, narratives are built around (and create) reputations of places, and these reputations become metaphors for more general policy design, markers of what problems exist and how they might be solved (see Chapter Three; Keith, 2005:157). Policy practitioners can at once recognise and use such metaphors, and dispute their accuracy when talking about their own local area, claiming more detailed knowledge of neighbourhoods and towns than 'outsiders' might have. Thus, in policy practice as elsewhere, multiple understandings of a place

(for example, as a metaphor for racialised segregation and as a place of everyday lived multiculturalism) can be invoked, without necessarily begging the question of which is more 'real' (Edelman, 1977:15). The shifting meanings of places and the techniques used to negotiate them are central to the way that community cohesion policy is practised and to the role of local government. There are strong parallels with practices of *branding*, and for that reason I have developed existing theoretical work on branding and on place-marketing to consider what these processes (more often thought of as promoting private financial investment) can tell us when expanded to consider the emotional power of meanings of place and their relevance to community, belonging, and governing.

David Harvey's (1989) discussion of a generalised move from managerial to entrepreneurial urban governance is worth re-visiting in this context. Writing in the late 1980s, Harvey examined (with cautious approval) how some Labour local authorities in Britain were seeking ways to work a prioritisation of equalities and elements of socialist principles into the dominant entrepreneurial logics of local government at that time. This required competition between municipalities for investment, residents and central government support (an early Third Way logic). The difference now is that this proto-Third Way has become the framework which local practitioners *must* negotiate. Alongside the traditionally business-minded imperatives of efficiency and productivity, New Labour's league tables and development of performance measures (already established under the previous Conservative administrations) were designed to make various measurements of well-being and public good the 'outcomes' which organisations would compete to deliver.<sup>5</sup>

Municipal boosterism comes in waves, and most recent sociological and geographical critiques have considered it in light of neoliberal frameworks that emphasise self-reliance and the requirement of places to compete for private investment (e.g. Evans, 2006; Harvey, 1989 Hitchcock, 1999; Shaw et al, 2004; Urry, 1995; Ward, 1998), though

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<sup>5</sup> It remains to be seen whether this focus will remain under the coalition government, whose major focus has been on 'efficiency' rather than the detailed performance measures of the previous administration (see e.g. Pickles, 2010).

examples of place-marketing can be found long before the twentieth century (Ward, 1998). 'Place shaping' became an explicit focus of local government work in the early twenty-first century,<sup>6</sup> as part of the more general trend towards promoting well-being and affective goods, within a framework of targets and quantification. Much local place-marketing by local authorities now marries the imperative of attracting private investment with an imperative of appealing to *local* residents. This is typical of the ways that New Labour administrations, building on their Conservative predecessors, have built social well-being concerns into adaptations of market and entrepreneurial principles for (local) government.

The Thatcherite era in Britain saw a wave of re-branding of previously abject cities as 'vibrant' and attractive, a much-cited campaign being 'Glasgow's Miles Better' (Ward, 1998). Interestingly, Ward contrasts the positivity of the Glasgow campaign with a contemporary publicity campaign by the London Borough of Hackney which described itself as 'Britain's Poorest Borough' (Ward, 1998:220). While Glasgow's campaign was primarily outward-facing and entrepreneurial, this more 'pessimistic' campaign from Hackney was intended to attract central government support. Ward notes that there were slim prospects for success of such an approach at that time, citing Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's 'general distaste for "moaning minnies" who complained about problems such as unemployment and poverty' (Ward, 1998:221). He suggests that such an approach might have been more successful in another period ('the 1960s, perhaps') but in the Thatcher period 'optimism was essential' (however misplaced). Written before the New Labour government's ascendancy, this assessment does not foresee how the two drives of the 'optimism' of competition, and concern with inequality would become married through Third Way quasi-marketisation of governance (Lister, 2001; Schofield, 2002; Shaw et al, 2004).

With government programmes in the 2000s which measured poverty and deprivation and targeted national resources to areas most in need, a different kind of entrepreneurial drive emerged. Local authorities attracting private capital were still favoured by central government, but drawing attention to local poverty no longer

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, DCLG (2006) and Lyons (2007).

necessarily resulted in dismissal as a 'moaning minnie'. Demonstrating need was an important tool in attracting financial and other support, thus the measurement of poverty reduction was a question to be negotiated carefully. If a borough attracted a growing wealthy population, the resulting increase in overall or average wealth in the borough might mean that central government support would be reduced – though the lot of the poorest residents may not have changed at all. Thus describing a place's status as one of the poorest areas in the country became a matter not simply of highlighting an area of challenge – but also of staking a claim to a share of national resources.

Such pressures have grown exponentially with the growth in inspections and publicly available league tables on local authority performance, as a whole and for individual services, and also in respect of reputation promoted through devices and techniques such as 'beacon status' and being regarded as a site of good practice. An important measure of 'success' at a national level includes 'customer satisfaction' measures of approval of the council, and more general questions such as the community cohesion indicator ('do you agree that people from different backgrounds get along well together in this area?' (CLG, 2007c:5)) which translate affective judgements into quantitative measures. As Harvey (1989) seems to foresee, local authorities are judged not just on the prosperity of their area, but on the satisfaction of residents both with where they live and with the local authority as arbiter of this. This would of course have always been the case at some level; elected members being accountable for resident satisfaction at local elections, and officers' careers benefiting or suffering from association with a council seen as successful or otherwise.

The emphasis on shared sense of place is also related to political concerns that global flows of people and capital have removed some of the certainties of life, thereby risking fractures between different sections of society (whether along lines of class, 'race', ethnicity, religion or some other factor). The attention to shared belonging which community cohesion policy prioritises is thus tied up directly with attempts to develop a shared, geographically-based sense of 'belonging' at a neighbourhood level, which of course relate to somehow presenting a sense of place that appeals to, and

rings true for, the variety of existing residents. This belonging also becomes something to be quantified and audited.

The importance of narrative has become explicitly recognised within the local-central government relationship, albeit in a peculiarly measurement-oriented sense. The Local Area Agreement process now requires all local authorities to provide an 'evidence-based story of place' which 'should present how groups of outcomes and performance indicators connect with each other... so that in telling the story of place GOs [Government Offices] and central government can understand the relationship (cause/effect) between indicators and targets' (CLG, 2007a:17). The brand of place is thus seen within these frameworks of governance as at least as important as (and tied up intimately with) the experience of place (or product) as lived materially through health, housing, education, etc. An attachment to, and positive impression of, a place may rely in part on these material services and amenities – but they could also be thought of as entirely separate to the feeling of the locality, or the emotional attachment to the place (and, in theory, the local authority). A guide to branding for local authorities, produced by the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), states:

The LGA's<sup>7</sup> analysis in 2007 of best value performance indicators (BVPI) data found that resident satisfaction with council services had no impact on public perceptions of the council improving lives and local areas. It also found that residents who feel informed by their council are far more likely to feel their council is making their local area a better place to live (IDeA, 2009).

Here, the advice to local authorities is that beyond simply improving the lives of their residents or the services they provide, they must *publicise* this success, and ensure that residents associate positive changes with interventions by the local authority. If this association is not made, satisfaction with the local authority (as measured by surveys) will be low, and this will count against the organisation in national league tables of the 'best performing' authorities. It is also likely to adversely affect the prospects of the

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<sup>7</sup> Local Government Association.

council's leadership in terms of career advancement or voting patterns.

### ***Conclusions***

This thesis engages with the everyday negotiations of officials, bureaucrats, elected politicians and policy experts in the act of government. But I am not examining a simple one-way process of the production of laws, policies, discourses or interventions that govern, and produce a distinct impact on or control populations. Nor am I investigating what these products or their impacts are, or whether they are effective. Rather, I am interested in looking beyond the opaque conception of the 'state' which does things to people, to consider the processes, practices and discourses that make up the state through their enactment, flows, revisions and sticking points. I am interested in this because it makes a difference to populations, and because understanding how this operates is at least as necessary as understanding what its effects might be, if one is to change things (in whatever way). The object of study is the practice of governing, and how those engaged in governing are themselves subject to processes of government.

I have suggested that acts of governing, particularly through techniques of governmentality, require some form of sociological imagination – that is, the ability to make links between 'the most impersonal and remote transformation to the most intimate features of the human self' (Mills, 1999 [1959]:7). My question is how this is enacted and what we might gain from thinking of policy as a process of negotiating meaning through contradictory positions. In Chapter Two I will expand on how I approach this research as embedded within practices of policy, and a reflective and analytical study rather than an outcome-focused intervention. As I have suggested in this chapter, in negotiating policy, practitioners can be seen to be conducting a form of public sociology. I aim to apply my own sociological analysis to these negotiations, recognising that the people I am studying are (in varying ways) self-aware, knowledgeable, perceptive agents.



This chapter has begun to demonstrate how ambiguity, affect and narrative are important in the governing of identity, belonging and community, particularly in the context of the modes of government which have developed in early twenty-first century Britain. This ethico-politics, in which control is exercised through shared values, culture and consumption, can be used to obscure difference and conflict (and uncomfortable positions), as we have seen (Rose, 1999b:170). Unresolved (and perhaps unresolvable) ambiguities are inherent in the issues encompassed in community cohesion policy. Techniques of governing which incorporate ambiguity and narrative as ways of talking about and intervening in difficult subjects may be essential, with the caveat that irresolution and (ethical) discomfort is likely to remain within an agonistic politics of ethics (Mouffe, 2005:113; Rose, 1999b:194). This thesis explores whether (and if so, how) techniques of governing through affect and ambiguity, through brand and myth, can be effected without ignoring the power inequalities which they may leave unspoken.

## Chapter Two: Getting Uncomfortable

### *Introduction*

Studies which focus on a discourse analysis of official policy texts (e.g. Burnett, 2007; McGhee, 2003) can only tell us so much. The deconstruction of particular effects of language can demonstrate the ways that specific political frameworks are implemented through a text, and can unpack philosophical perspectives or taken-for-granted assumptions that are relied upon to confer meaning. However, this approach does not take into account the possibility for active interpretation of such texts by those who use them; in fact it risks attributing agency to the documents themselves, rather than to people who produce and use them. It neglects that such documents are often knowingly produced as potentially ambiguous tools, and disregards the possibility that policy practitioners might be as perceptive or reflexive as the sociologist (Sayer, 2005:7).

This is not to dismiss the importance of the written document as an anchor for policy debates. A number of key texts form such anchors for the organisation of my research, and they do so because such texts are used by policy practitioners to root and route their navigation of policy 'agendas'. This does not mean that such texts are static, or that they are treated as static by policy practitioners (except when this is strategically useful). The 'event' of a major policy report can be treated as marking a particular turning point in debate or action; the central meanings that individual users of that document take away are not necessarily consistent or pre-determined by the producers of the document. This cannot be taken into account by a documentary discourse analysis, though such an analysis can provide a starting point, a menu of potential meanings, resonances and undertones that such documents represent. An engagement with the practices – negotiations – that surround these documents is necessary to more fully understand the effects they have in the social world.

For this reason, my research methodology includes attention to key policy documents,

but links this analysis to the interpretations and uses made by policy practitioners of those documents, and the work that goes into their production. These negotiations and understandings are accessed through extensive qualitative interviews, and through ethnographic analysis of my own experiences and observations as a policy practitioner.

This chapter takes apart the research question (*how do policy practitioners negotiate difficult subjects?*) piece by piece, discussing what I mean by each term and how it relates to the broader themes of research and analysis that run through the thesis. As I do so, I explain how the research question and research strategy were formed and shaped over time. I then elaborate on the types of *uncomfortable positions* that policy practitioners might take in these negotiations, and how my methodology provides access to ways of understanding these positions. The questions of authority and reflexivity this opens up have direct parallels with academic debates about ethics and positioning of the critical researcher. Following this, I consider specific instances of my own uncomfortable positioning during this research, particularly relating to the ambiguities of researching a familiar environment, of my funding arrangements, of proximity, bias and authority. I briefly explain the empirical attention I have given to 'elsewheres' which appear to form the constitutive outside of community cohesion policy and ideas of place. Finally, I take each of my three sources of data – documents, ethnography and interviews – and explain why they are important for this project and the status I have given to the data I produced through each. I also spell out the practical steps involved in producing and analysing that data.

### **How do policy practitioners negotiate difficult subjects?**

This was never intended as a prescriptive study, an analysis of how to 'do' policy or government better, or a vision of 'what should be'. Rather, I aim to understand ambiguities and difficulties in these processes. Informally, the importance of marshalling language as well as understanding differences in political power seemed to me to be widely acknowledged within (and outside) governing institutions. Yet

bureaucratic government depends on the persistent belief in, fantasy of, or aspiration towards an ideal of transparent, technical and objective decision-making (du Gay, 2000:141).

The research question was formed from my own experience of some of these uncomfortable positions, though initially it was not articulated in that way. It moved from a framing about 'how community cohesion policy is developed', to be re-focused on the actual *negotiations* of government practitioners to develop community cohesion policy, in response to my emerging empirical data. The focus is on the work policy practitioners do to create, maintain, obstruct, manipulate or change policies and institutions – including, often, work on themselves. These negotiations that policy practitioners undertake are the focus of the study. They include negotiations with others, and with their own understandings of the world, in order to carry out their professional roles and to reconcile these roles with their personal, political and ethical commitments.

### ***How do policy practitioners negotiate difficult subjects?***

This brings me to the question of *difficult subjects*. There are three sets of 'subjects' which could be implied here, and perhaps the most obvious is the one I am least concerned with. Studies of government or governmentality are concerned with the construction and management of (somehow problematic) populations of subjects (in the sense of selves) (Miller and Rose, 2008:14). 'Difficult subjects' might refer to members of the population who are difficult to govern, and the ways that policy practitioners negotiate (with, or around) them. This type of 'difficult subject' is relevant to the thesis, in the sense that the production and negotiation of community cohesion policy is ostensibly aimed at governing just such 'difficult subjects'. However, as demonstrated in Chapter One, this is not the primary concern of the thesis, and little time will be spent on addressing the actual construction or management of populations.

Secondly, policy practitioners themselves are 'difficult subjects' because they are subjects (selves) who at once govern and are governed; they are subject to the policies they develop as well as explicitly active in the development of policies as tools of government (Bell and Binnie, 2000:18; Brown, 1997:87; Hunter, 2003). Their awareness of this double positioning, as well as their sometime awareness of the ambiguities of processes, practices and policies of governmentality, can make their experience of subject-hood difficult; their negotiation of their professional roles in research encounters with me were to a great extent concerned also with their negotiation of their own sense of self. Policy practitioners can be 'difficult subjects' for analysts of policy and political processes, insofar as such analysts focus on government as a process of institutions, the individuals who work within and make up such institutions are understood only in their professional roles, and their motivations are thus reduced to their professional commitments (McKee, 2009:478-9; see also Chapter One). Understanding their occupation of a space beyond the professional thus becomes difficult, and they can only be understood by such theoretical frameworks within one delineated realm of subjectivity at a time (Gordon, 1991:4; Miller and Rose, 2008:8; see also Chapter One).

The third meaning of 'difficult subjects', and the most central to the research question, is not concerned with subjectivity or selfhood, at least not directly. This is 'subjects' understood in the more colloquial sense of topics or issues. The question here engages directly with discourse and language and how they are manipulated. *Difficult subjects* are difficult because there is a lack of (acceptable) language to talk about them; or because these subjects risk provoking disagreement or discord; or because individuals or groups are unsure about how to understand them; or because they relate to underlying issues which are simply not up for negotiation. They are also difficult because, partly as cause and partly as effect of these uncertainties, they are slippery; they can call on multiple narratives, resonances and ideas.

The difficult subject I concentrate on is community cohesion policy. Community cohesion policy is a collection of ideas, practices and texts, rather than a discretely

defined subject. It touches on a whole host of other subjects – difference, inequality and discrimination along lines of class, race, gender, religion, age and geography, conflicting values, questions of nationhood, community, belonging, trust, power and governance. Many of these subjects (many of which might be considered 'difficult' in their own right) are central to how interviewees defined community cohesion policy, and indeed to how its development is understood in policy and academic literatures (see Chapter Three). The negotiations of community cohesion policy's meanings and resonances provide many opportunities to take up or avoid uncomfortable positions. Meanwhile, its proponents' insistence that it should be considered in all areas of public services (if not life) allows us to consider how far it morphs and changes in different contexts. Using a difficult subject as a lens through which to examine the more general functioning of government is not unique; Cooper and Monro (2003), for example, use lesbian and gay equality work as a lens through which to examine the organisational functioning of local government, and its 'state identities' (see also Bell and Binnie, 2000:13-16; Cooper, 1995). However, my use of this lens is innovative in that community cohesion policy is intended to influence all areas of local government work (CLG, 2009), and my examination of its dynamic engages directly with policy practice. While community cohesion policy discourse is central to the tale that will be told, it is of interest as a way of examining negotiations and practices, rather than a term to be defined in itself by this thesis.

Thus the research question – *how do policy practitioners negotiate difficult subjects?* – concentrates on how difficult subjects (questions or topics that are hard to grasp, can be ambiguously interpreted, are inherently conflictual, and are perhaps unresolvable) are negotiated by policy practitioners. These are subjects which, even while being viewed as technocratic problems to be solved through processes of government or policy implementation, can connect with deeply held political beliefs and personal experiences. The subjectivity of the policy practitioners emerges as an important force in these negotiations, in which practitioners often take, or find themselves in, uncomfortable positions – but their subjectivity emerges as *part* of the negotiations, rather than itself being the difficult subject with which I begin my investigation.

### ***How do policy practitioners negotiate difficult subjects?***

The *negotiation* of difficult subjects can be thought of in two senses: as trying to reach agreement or compromise (usually in dialogue with others); and as finding a way through difficult terrain. Both of these are active processes, and suggest work as well as a journey. These processes also depend on the construction of narrative. The negotiations I will discuss are constructed as narrative in several different ways by policy practitioners themselves – as well as being re-assembled in my analysis in narrative form.

Narratives can be conceived of as accounts of a series of causally connected events, usually involving a main protagonist. While there are continuing debates over competing definitions of 'narrative' and 'story' (Paley, 2009:18-21), semantic wrangling doesn't really concern me here. What I want to emphasise is that narratives/stories are accounts which are constructed, and that their telling is intended to have, and has, effects on social relationships (Gunaratnam, 2009:55; Paley, 2009:30; Samuel and Thompson, 1990:8). Through narratives, people make sense of the world, make arguments about the world, and re-make the world (Trouillot, 1995:23). To reach agreement or compromise, people construct narratives which demonstrate connections between different points of view or priorities, and mask or overcome continuing differences (Bonnett, 1993:79; Christie, 2006; Revill, 1993:121; Valentine et al, 2010:927). To find a way through difficult terrain, people try to imagine how the path they are constructing will lead to their eventual goal. As part of the process of negotiating difficult subjects, policy practitioners produce textual narratives in documents which attempt to provide these anchoring narratives and connections. They also (often in a different register) construct narratives about how these documents are produced and used. I take the content of both of these types of narratives seriously – and also to pay attention to their construction (in the latter case – how people construct their narratives *about* how they construct narratives). While the predominant focus is the *practice* of negotiation, the content of narratives which

enable and constitute this negotiation is also important as 'a means to understand our subjects<sup>8</sup> better' (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000:32).

I have conceptualised narrative in policy practice in four connected ways. Firstly, there is the narrative that appears in textual documents, providing a coherent and fully-formed presentation of institutional or political standpoints, plans or options (Llewellyn, 2001).<sup>9</sup> These narratives can be studied in themselves and their internal contradictions, assumptions and exclusions demonstrated. Their production and publication is used (by practitioners and by analytical observers) to structure policy narratives of what happened, when, and why. The narratives *in* the document are important in that they are (part of) the product of negotiations, and they are also texts on which further negotiations work (Foucault, 2002 [1969]:6-7; Hunter, 2008; Riles, 2006; Strathern, 2006; Swan, 2010). But this does not in itself address the work involved in constructing and using these documents, or how that work entails negotiations with a range of 'stakeholders', with existing policies, discourses and institutions, and with resonances of language and form which determine what is possible.

Though less obviously taking narrative form, the second sense of narrative which I use is to consider the process of negotiating (difficult subjects through) policy. It involves writing, reading and translating; talking, remembering and revising; meeting, not meeting and excluding. It is conducted by policy practitioners embedded in organisations and institutional practices. There are narratives of how it is *supposed* to work and occasional analyses of why it does not work; but the fragmentary, variable and intangible is difficult to capture. This is not unique to policy processes, but is true of many aspects of 'real life' (Law, 2003:3). For the purposes of understanding these negotiations, I draw on my own ethnographic experiences embedded in the negotiations of difficult subjects through policy. Inevitably, I present these experiences

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<sup>8</sup> Subjects here in the sense of the selves doing the negotiating.

<sup>9</sup> While Strathern (2006) disputes that 'bullet-point' documents constitute narratives, Llewellyn (2001) makes a strong case for understanding policy documents and strategies as narratives, where they envision a journey with a destination or desired outcome.



in a narrative form in order to communicate more-or-less coherent understanding and analysis by connecting events, interactions and observations. In this sense my research translates these negotiations into narrative – re-framing memories which are themselves assembled through technologies of notes, documents and artefacts (Rose, 1998:180). In doing so, I recognise that my narratives are partial, embodied and embedded, and variable with time and context. They are in themselves a technology (Paley, 2009:17), in this case for understanding the processes of policy practice and governing in the context of the research account (Gunaratnam, 2009:58).

Thirdly, a great deal of my data is drawn from interviews with policy practitioners in which they present their understandings of the development of community cohesion policy in the form of narratives which draw on (shifting meanings of) specific places, times, events, documents and myths (Keith and Pile, 1993:37), with many, notably, connecting these understandings to *narratives of self*. A central tool in negotiating difficult subjects, this time in the sense of negotiating around difficult terrain, was to anchor subjects (issues) in an understanding of the self. Interviewees used biographical narratives, or elements of them, to claim a space from which to speak about issues where questions of power and situated knowledge were near the surface. This is *not* intended to suggest that this direct attention to identity reveals some more complete or authentic truth about the processes and negotiations of policy, or practitioners' understandings of them, than would be found through other means of observation or research (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997:314). Rather, the interviews present one form of data on the *ways* that policy practitioners negotiate these difficult subjects (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000:32). This data is *itself* a negotiation, and it is a data set which is produced by and dependent on the interview methodology which I used (Paley, 2009:23; Skeggs, 2002).

The fourth type of narrative is spatial, a shared 'folk knowledge' which explains the concept of community cohesion evolving over time and space. As this spatial narrative was so strong in discourses of cohesion, I decided to adapt my research strategy to embrace this reflective myth-making, by following the threads of narrative to places that appeared as symbols. The intention was not to prove or disprove the 'truth' about

local experiences of community cohesion represented in this narrative. As I have noted, the content of the narrative is of interest precisely because it sheds light on the process of negotiation. By focusing on negotiation, I examine how policy practitioners who are constructed *within* the narrative, negotiate their way *through* these narratives, and narrate their own place in relation to cohesion. I will discuss this element of methodological innovation further in the section on research sites and 'elsewheres'. Developing the literature on place-branding introduced in Chapter One, I consider the role of place in the construction of narratives in detail in Chapters Three, Five and Six.

### ***How do policy practitioners negotiate difficult subjects?***

As outlined in Chapter One, I am interested in the *practice* of governing, and my methodology stays close to this *practice* by using participant observation and interviews in which policy practitioners reflect on their own conduct. The research focus on *local* government (and its relationship to central government) to some extent blurs the lines between bureaucrat and politician. New Public Management theory (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992), but also longer histories of municipal governance (e.g. see Lansley et al, 1989:1) and the funding settlement between levels of government, have often positioned local actors as simply implementing nationally decided policies. This is not to suggest that there is no distinction between local elected politicians and the officers employed by local authorities (or other local institutions). Indeed, their concerns and motivations, as well as their formal statutory obligations, powers and restrictions, can vary greatly. However, they have both been included in my research to consider the 'small-p' political negotiations that non-politicians do, and the technocratic elements that form part of the workings of elected politicians. As such, this research does not focus solely on the bureaucrat, but notes the distinction between bureaucratic and political ethos made by du Gay (2000; 2007) and others, and considers to what extent this is evident – or contested – in practice.

The question of identity and subjectivity in relation to government has received

attention in social policy and sociology, whether this is bracketed as psychosocial, feminist, queer, post-colonial or governmentality research (e.g. Ahmed, 2007b; Cooper, 1995; Hoggett, 2000; Lewis, 2000; Rose, 1999b; Stenner et al, 2008). However, there has been less research into how processes of identity and subjectivity are invoked by those acting within governing roles, in terms of how those roles actually work (Hunter, 2003:324; Keith, 2008b:332). Exceptions to this do exist, largely based on qualitative interview work with bureaucrats which takes seriously their self-presentation and relationship to their work. This engagement with self-presentation is not treated as a 'true' or 'untrue' description of power relationships, but as a technique which allows practitioners to undertake and make sense of their work, whether protecting or attempting to disrupt the prevailing power dynamic (e.g. Cooper, 2006; Hoggett et al, 2006; Hunter, 2005; Lipsky, 1980; Puwar, 2001). My study takes this further by engaging with these practices as both participant and observer.

### ***Uncomfortable positions***

When negotiating difficult subjects, policy practitioners often find themselves, and present themselves, as occupying *uncomfortable positions*. By uncomfortable positions, I mean discourses and practices which are contradictory and unresolved. Discomfort often seems to arise from irresolution between what should be and what is; between one's privileged position and one's political commitments to equality. It is experienced as affective, embodied, emotional discomfort. Here I want to explain my understanding of uncomfortable positions as a subject of research, and how the discomfited positions of researcher and research subject are related.

My first concern is with the status of knowledge of a critical researcher, in relation to that of the policy practitioner as research participant. Policy practitioners are in the business of producing knowledge and analysis. Often, they use research produced by social scientists in their work. This cross-over can be difficult to negotiate for researchers concerned about maintaining critical distance from their subject matter.

Strathern (2000), for example, notes that cultures of audit, in the sense of self-examination and representation to others, have become embedded in academic institutions. But she seems adamant that these should be maintained as two separate roles. Even when positions of both critical researcher and auditor are occupied by the same person, Strathern argues, it is 'absurd' to consider these selves as able to interact and reflect 'face-to-face' on the same knowledges (2006:193). She suggests that policy documents are a form of shield used in negotiation between institutions (universities in her case) and government, with which the institution attempts to demonstrate its capability to govern itself by affirming that it will behave as the government wishes it to. Yet Strathern does not appear to be objecting to the manner in which universities agree to behave in return for a lack of direct interference from government. What she objects to is that these agreements (e.g. to pursue research 'of the highest quality') appear to her to be meaningless, and so the process of issuing a written commitment to that effect is a waste of time. If Strathern's point is that policy documents which contain bullet-points are a ritual practice, it seems odd for an anthropologist to thereby dismiss them. When she says that instead of engaging in the processes of audit and governance, 'we ought to be making knowledge useful' (Strathern, 2006:200), she seems to be neglecting that what is 'of use' might not be the contents of a text or artefact, but the use and practices to which it is put (Rose, 1999b:29). By suggesting that the roles of administration and critical thought must be separated completely, she implies that trying to cross these boundaries would pollute the pure act of intellectual endeavour.

Riles (2006) gives more of a sense of how such cross-overs can be confounding in her analysis of her experience of being an anthropologist at a United Nations meeting on gender. She found that shared subject matter and vocabularies somehow prevented social scientists from intervening in bureaucratic or political debate with the insights they would have provided in an academic forum (p.79). Because the same terms were being used to denote different things – or more importantly, to achieve different goals – the anthropologists in this case found that their expertise was silenced as they were left without their own language. Yet Riles concludes by arguing that the silences these convergences create should be paid greater attention, rather than simply avoided

through separation of the two roles (p.89). There can be, then, a useful knowledge created by crossing these boundaries. As Bonnett puts it: 'contradiction needs to be understood at the level of lived experience' (1993:177), which might also invoke the idea of affective, embodied experience.

The idea of emotion as a motivating force is anathema to some theorists of bureaucracy (in particular du Gay, 2000; 2007). Du Gay argues that the personae of bureaucrat and individual should be kept separate. He suggests that attempts of New Public Management and psychological theories of management to integrate feeling into public services have undermined the commitment to impartiality which is a central tenet of the public service ethos. This has parallels with Strathern's (2006) insistence noted above, that the roles of bureaucrat and analyst cannot be lived at the same moment. The difference is that du Gay has a much more positive view of the ideal of an impartial bureaucrat, implementing rules without personal reflection. That is not to suggest that he does not recognise the political aspects of bureaucratic work – the negotiation and interpretation that is necessary for, in his main case, the civil service to develop politicians' ideas into workable policies (du Gay, 2000:141). But du Gay's chief point is that for these negotiations to be successful, bureaucrats *must* conform to an impartiality which allows them to work with governments of changing political persuasion (du Gay, 2000:139-40). My argument is that this is an ideal type, or a useful fiction, rather than what actually happens, or can happen, in practice (Mayo et al, 2007). I must stress that this study is not intended to 'expose' how bureaucracy does not function according to norms of impartiality, but to consider how people within organisations negotiate these norms, given their inevitable embeddedness as persons with commitments (which they may or may not put to one side at times) as well as functionaries.

It is worth noting that these debates about discomfort and impartiality are as relevant to the academy as to the bureau. That is, they are part of my discussion of methodology and how I negotiate it, as much as they are part of what my research participants are doing. In this I address both the status I give to the accounts of my research participants, and the status that should be given to my own words. The

auditing or self-assessment required of the policy practitioner is also required by the sociologist through processes of reflexivity and accounting for methodologies (as in the production of a PhD methodology chapter). There are risks of slipping into the performance of reflexivity as a way of absolving one's mistakes and performing Good Practice (Strathern, 2006:200) for the researcher, as there are for the bureaucrat. The hope, though, is that the accounting of and for methodology and method is more than a simple exercise in audit, and that it produces analytically productive insights.

Such struggles to find ways to critique social inequalities whilst also being embedded in them (indeed in some ways able to critique inequalities because of the privilege those inequalities provide) have concerned researchers in traditions of feminism, anti-racism, and post-colonialism (Ahmed, 2000; Skeggs, 2002:362; Spivak, 1988). Bell hooks invites the privileged subject – in stronger words, 'the oppressor' (hooks, 1990:146) – to 'choose the margin', as a 'site of radical possibility' (p.149); to 'enter that space' (p.152) of constant change, struggle and resistance. She suggests that selves who have been marginalised by others – because of their gendered or racialised identities, for example – can make a virtue of their ability to see the world from an outsider's perspective, able to disrupt dominant categorisations. This echoes Du Bois's conception of the 'double consciousness' of those whom racism has subjected to a 'sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others' (Du Bois, 1994 [1903]:2), as a resource, a source of knowledge of ambiguity and power struggles. Hooks wrestles with the necessities of using language which 'carries the scent of oppression' (hooks, 1990:146) to reveal and resist that oppression. Her essay is hopeful in that by *choosing* – rather than being relegated to – a marginal position outside of the dominating centre, one might be able to recreate and reinvent the language and its interpretation, and through this, relations of domination. One might find in the shared margin a 'radical creative space which affirms and sustains our subjectivity, which gives us a new location from which to articulate our sense of the world' (p.153). Her call to the reader – both 'oppressed and oppressor' – suggests that this marginal space could be an opportunity to re-imagine and reinvent relationships by constantly unsettling and transforming perspectives on non-marginal space.

Following hooks, my argument is that attempting to maintain consciousness of the ambiguity afforded by a marginal position is difficult, perhaps sometimes impossible – but that attempting it can provide a productive tension. The production of *public sociology*, as I envisaged it in Chapter One, means entering these precarious positions and opening oneself up to possibilities (which might include the possibility of being wrong). Gunaratnam outlines how such an approach to research can create vulnerabilities for the researcher as well as the researched:

The fundamental problematic of interpretation... is that it is always a risky, emotion-laden and ethical business... [to] practise our... crafts in ways that aspire to the honing of technique and skill and that give recognition to our being touched... while all the time remaining faithful and vulnerable to the unknown (Gunaratnam, 2009:59).

This point about the role of emotion in uncomfortable positions is important. As Gunaratnam suggests, one can be at once skilled and technical, and aware and responsive to emotion and vulnerability. Emotions are embodied responses to situations (Sayer, 2005:37), attached to commitments which *mean* something to the individual, and which are part of the self – not just a preference. As such, they should be taken seriously. If commitments come into conflict (for instance, professional and political commitments) then we might expect this to produce an emotional response as much as a rational or articulated one. Hence we should not be surprised if difficult subjects create situations in which individuals *feel* uncomfortable; and we should not necessarily dismiss this discomfort as self-indulgent or self-protecting. We should take into account what provokes such emotional reactions, and how these reactions can motivate action, including within the policy process.

Such a position can all too easily be dismissed as simply a performative attempt at self-exculpation and the re-enforcement of privilege without action towards greater social justice (Ahmed, 2004b:118; Berlant, 2004:11; Skeggs, 2004:131). But indulging the narration of privileged selves is not the point. Rather, it is to seek out whether, and where, there are possibilities for such privileged selves to take a position which

recognises their (our) privilege, and uses it to improve the equity of social relations, without simply reinforcing a colonising relationship. Whether such a position might be possible is as relevant to debates about the role of the sociologist and academic as to debates about that of the policy practitioner (Skeggs, 1997:15). There is also a risk that such attention can turn into an over-reliance on the explanatory power of psychoanalytic theory to account for social processes, at the expense of an understanding of political and power relations (as seems to be the case in Hollway and Jefferson (2000:19-20) for example). However, avoiding those pitfalls should not mean abandoning an attention to the ways that affect and emotion inform social action and interaction and refract political behaviours. This attention is important *not* to produce empathy for the subjects whose emotional and emotive negotiations are at stake, but to concentrate on how this emotional filter comes to dominate discourse, process and action *because of* a particular moment of political and social formations, and how such a filter (as a result of these formations) then informs and inflects the types of political and social action that is possible (Ahmed, 2004b:10; Sayer, 2005:3). Nor are emotions, commitments, morals or ethics necessarily conservative. They can be, where a settlement is reached to cope with an oppressive situation – but they can also provoke resistance to dominant norms (Sayer, 2005:100). As Berlant, writing about compassion, notes, emotional complexes have 'powerfully material and personal consequences' (2004:11), whether these are progressive or conservative. Emotions, and the emotionally uncomfortable positions of policy practitioners, are worthy of study not simply as an experiences within the self, but for their impact on social relations (Skeggs, 2002:350).

### ***My uncomfortable positions***

There are two concrete ways in which my relationship to this research project and its subjects require particular consideration. Firstly, having worked as a policy practitioner in Hackney, I had existing relationships with many research participants, and perceptions about how policy negotiations work. This experience informs and enriches



my data and provides opportunities for ethnographic description based on participant observation. These histories also provided credentials that undoubtedly helped me to achieve access to interviewees both within and outside Hackney that would otherwise have been much more difficult. But there is a risk that these connections could blur my analytic lens through over-familiarity or lack of questioning of norms and practices.

In fact, the doctoral project emerged precisely *because* of such a questioning. I do not think that I can reveal a moment of realisation (Denzin, 1989:10) in which I noticed the negotiations of policy practice, the knowing compromises that are involved and the steps people take to manage their own commitments and those of others. However, an illustrative example was an incident when I was involved in developing new governance arrangements for children's services. This emerged after sitting with a group of the most senior managers from health, education and social services and trying to agree on a shared definition of 'commissioning', a term each of the three professions used to describe slightly different relationships to designing and delivering services. There were many meetings on this subject, covering similar ground and objections, after which I or other colleagues would draft another version of a policy paper attempting to reconcile different definitions and practices, only for it to be discussed and revised again. Finally, in one meeting it seemed all three heads of service had reached agreement about the word 'commissioning' and how it could be used in joint planning. But as we left the room, I realised that what had actually been agreed was that colleagues would not dispute the others' use of the word 'commissioning', yet would continue to operate within each service with the existing practices. This wasn't necessarily a problem in itself (though it had taken a long time to reach this situation). The point is that all those involved were aware of the different uses of language and meaning which they were negotiating individually and together, and reconciled that while they may not have reached agreement, they had reached something which they could treat *as* agreement (Young, 1990:33).

It is clear that when operating in this environment, the ability to hold several contradictory opinions at once is necessary. But this is different to Orwell's 'doublethink' (Orwell, 1949) in the dystopian *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. There is a sort of

self-policing involved, but there is also a recognition among (many) policy practitioners that sometimes these manoeuvres can be contradictory. I certainly felt (but was also able to operate within) the cognitive dissonance of this necessary discomfort. So did many of my colleagues who could reflect on the sometime absurdity of the policy process, but also see it as a form of negotiation necessary to develop shared meanings or cope with competing prerogatives. As I have said, this was not a realisation that came upon me suddenly, but a habitus formed by and forming the policy process. Thinking about the importance of this way of being, how it functions and what work it enables seemed like an important area for exploration in a research project.

A more unusual aspect of my relationship to the research was that my studentship became funded, after its initial stages, through a collaborative (CASE) studentship, by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) with an annual contribution from the London Borough of Hackney (LBH). CASE studentships are an initiative of the ESRC meant to encourage PhD research to be connected to arenas beyond academia. To set one up, a university department and a non-academic partner organisation (in this case, LBH), agree a research proposal for a PhD thesis which will also provide work that is of use to the non-academic organisation, and alongside this a programme of support from, and involvement in the work of, the organisation for the research student. In this case, I worked up the research and support proposals with both partners and we received approval and funding from the ESRC, who provided the majority of the funds for my tuition fees and living costs, with a smaller contribution from LBH. Prior to the CASE studentship, I had begun the PhD on a part-time basis, while working for LBH part-time and with an agreement that they would pay my part-time tuition fees. That prior agreement, however, did not include any formal discussions of the subject of my studies, or of arrangements for cooperation with fieldwork.

At the outset of the CASE arrangement, all partners signed an agreement about ethics and intellectual property which stated that my research for the PhD would be guided ultimately by my academic supervisors. While I would share findings with the non-academic supervisors from LBH throughout the research and discuss any matters of contention, they would not have a right of veto over writing or publications. A

studentship panel was held quarterly involving LBH, Goldsmiths and me, at which we reviewed progress on fieldwork and writing, and work I was doing for the local authority. This work, which also formed part of the studentship arrangement, involved sharing my expertise as an academic researcher with the local authority in practical ways. For example, I produced a position paper which was used as a basis for discussion of how Hackney might approach the concept of community cohesion in a locally-relevant way. I also gave advice and comments on research design and research reports that were commissioned by the council from outside organisations as part of their consultation on a community cohesion strategy. This model of research collaboration suggests some expectations about research that will be practical, applied or technocratic, producing measurable, quantifiable or obviously 'useful' outputs. As a CASE student, I was constantly thinking about the 'usefulness' of my research, even as I tried to ensure this did not limit my methodology or analysis. The example of our specific project shows that such collaborations do not have to close down opportunities for freedom of intellectual inquiry. To a large extent, this freedom was dependent on a partnership between individuals within organisations who saw value in finding time and space for reflection without predetermined utilitarian applications. Its success also depended on my ability to participate in more instrumental activities linked to the research while developing critical theoretical underpinnings for the thesis.

This type of work does not easily fit into the methodological discussions either of researching 'up' or 'down'. The research participants *are* powerful, and could be considered 'elite', in that they are opinion formers and being researched precisely because they are powerful. However, their powerful or elite status is in many cases directly comparable to that of the academic. Indeed, in many cases they may have been colleagues; or the same person may cross 'between worlds' at different points. To some extent this was true in my case. Although many of the interviewees with whom I spoke had been senior to me, they were also colleagues I had worked with and advised directly. Thus the usual methodological concerns about accessing and being manipulated by elite research subjects (e.g. Phillips, 1998), while relevant, do not fit neatly here. Feminist methodological concerns with listening and engaging with research participants, with not exploiting one's power as researcher (e.g. Oakley, 2005

[1981]), similarly do not quite fit. It is about finding a space between the assumption that power needs to be shared with the research participants, and that the researcher is manipulated by the participants. This is another precarious position: one which I attempted to negotiate as a researcher by paying close attention to research participants' accounts, being clear about the contexts of these accounts, and explaining the grounds for my analysis and findings within the thesis, so that they can remain open to challenge from the reader.

My proximity to many of the research participants not just in terms of shared professional and personal biographies, but in terms of social positioning and political or analytical outlook and skills emerged most strikingly in interviews when the analysis an interviewee put forward was almost exactly my own. This is a different experience from an interviewee saying something which one knows will illustrate perfectly, when quoted, a point that is becoming clear from the research. Rather, she produced statements that I would have been happy to include in my own authored analysis section. If I had been using interviews as sources of information about 'what really happened', I might have been encouraged by this, seeing it as definite confirmation that my analysis was correct, because participants agreed with it. But my approach to the interview and other data was to treat them as performances and tools intended to produce particular effects in particular circumstances. As such, maybe the convergence or our analysis was a warning that I was too close to the material and the participants' own observations?

On reflection, I took it to be evidence that researchers are *not that special*. I do not mean to undermine myself too much at this point. My research for this project reached much more broadly than a single interviewee's experience, and my analysis draws on more (and different) theoretical frameworks. I have spent more time and given attention to different things than my interviewees might in their experience, or than I would have in other circumstances (i.e. outside of my researcher role). So I believe I can claim additional value for this study and its conclusions beyond simply reflecting and repeating the lay-person's views; but I want to emphasise that this privileged position comes from the particular purpose and context of conducting the research. It

also comes from a particular intellectual training, which in large part is shared with many of the participants in my research.<sup>10</sup> In this sense I am in the uncomfortable position of an expert whose expertise remains open to challenge from others who have different, but perhaps equally valid, grounds for expertise.

Relationships with participants, research sites and research projects shift, and involve emotional investment as well as time and professional energies (Coffey, 1999:46). For me, these shifts involved negotiating a position which created, at times, perceptions that I might be moving between roles of friend, colleague, adviser, 'spy', auditor or competitor. In the role of researcher, I could (be seen to) occupy all of these roles, and none of them.

### ***Research sites, and elsewhere***

The majority of my fieldwork was carried out with local government officers and politicians and their colleagues in other governance agencies in Hackney. Looking at how community cohesion policy, questions of difference, belonging and equality are negotiated within local government in Hackney specifically is important firstly because it is a place full of diversity (in many senses) where there is a widespread self-consciousness about the presence of difference and how it is lived. Indeed, competition for the interpretation and ownership of difference in Hackney and how it changes or is preserved is evident both in processes of governing and in public debate (see Chapter Five).

Secondly, Hackney is an important place to explore these issues precisely because it does not fit in the usual narrative mappings of community cohesion policy. Community

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<sup>10</sup> It is more than likely that my participants will take an interest, or may indeed just 'come across' this research (see also Puwar, 1997); indeed, many were interested in reading the final version. Even if I should choose to, I would never be able to get away with assuming that I could treat data however I might wish because 'it is unlikely' that a named participant might 'come across' the research (as Hollway and Jefferson (2000:91) decide is the case with their working class participants).

cohesion policy is an area in which the borough is seen as – and presents itself as – an example of good practice and achievement, or where community cohesion is seen as unproblematic, making consideration of the policy irrelevant. In this context, the negotiation of multiple interpretations of both community cohesion (policy) and of the geographical and historical place are open to exploration in the narratives of policy practitioners. Chapter Four explores another example where Hackney explicitly did *not* fit into the national policy frameworks I was studying – the case of the Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) programme. Because I have used Hackney as a case study for understanding PVE, my findings are a story of how policy *does not fit* with the local, when that locality is a place for which the policy was not necessarily designed (as indeed, many places – specifically London – are largely neglected especially in early formulations of community cohesion policy – see Chapter Three). This limits the generalisability of my findings, of course, but it also provides an opportunity for a different type of knowledge from that generated by studies of these policies which more usually focus on the locations in which they are seen to 'fit' (e.g. Husband and Alam, 2011).

Of course there is a third set of reasons why Hackney was an ideal site for this research project: the practicalities of my own situation. I began the project here because of my own interest in, familiarity with, and access to the geographical area and the local authority. From there, I established the CASE studentship, described above, which helped to secure formal support from the local authority. But these practical advantages to using Hackney as a research site also stemmed from its inherent analytical interest. Starting from a general interest in Hackney presents research questions about cohesion, diversity and belonging, and the relations between central and local government, as much as starting from those questions can lead one back to Hackney.

By starting to unravel my research question (how do policy practitioners negotiate difficult subjects?) in Hackney, I was led to additional research sites. The power of narrative in Hackney, particularly when exploring its apparent success in living with difference, was evident from my earliest research interventions. It quickly became clear

that these narratives were constantly being told in relation to other places, that contrast with elsewhere made sense of the local Hackney experience. At the same time as criticising 'outsiders' for inaccurately stereotyping Hackney, 'insiders' would use similarly simplified views of other places as they made sense of the world. This prompted me to widen the research field beyond Hackney in two ways.

Firstly, this meant exploring the negotiation of community cohesion policy and related narratives of policy practitioners working at a national level, at the interface with local government. Hackney policy practitioners presented their understanding of community cohesion and of Hackney in reaction to an outside, and to outsiders' (faulty) perceptions of Hackney. Community cohesion was seen as an area where Hackney could be a national leader, whereas in many areas of public service and quality of life it might not be. More generally, the experience of local government is very much tied to national government priorities and actions. Though community cohesion policy can be interpreted as tying in with a push toward locally determined identities, it is also a nationally-created term and a set of policy ideas that have only become discussed in these terms in Hackney because of national discourse. Therefore, it seemed that one of the difficult subjects being negotiated locally was how to reconcile national requirements with local needs. Thus the negotiations being made at the interface between national and local government, in central government departments, national lobbying and membership bodies, think tanks and professional organisations, was a second field of study. Largely I accessed this through interviews, but again I had opportunities to make ethnographic observations through attendance at public and private events (such as consultation meetings, policy round tables, and conferences) and through the data available in documents published by these organisations.

Secondly, I took the narrative thread used by my interviewees, and followed it to three locations (Oldham, Barking and Dagenham, and Peterborough) which were used in their accounts of community cohesion policy to represent a typology of times, places and constellations of difference and conflict. This innovation was not intended to provide direct comparators to the main research site, and the research in those locations is by no means extensive enough to do so. Rather, it engages with the status

of the three other localities as marker points within narratives of community cohesion, and explores how policy practitioners within those sites work with and against this status. This is in contrast to the work in Hackney which extended across the broad range of governance institutions and areas of policy and service, to consider how community cohesion policy was understood across the range of practices of local government and its partners.

I will expand on the effects of place and event in narrative more fully in Chapter Three, and the resonances of each of the three 'elsewheres' (Oldham, Barking and Dagenham, and Peterborough). Here I want to emphasise that they were used to explore how negotiations of policy and place are made by practitioners who have become enmeshed in a web of meanings associated with a particular form of policy discourse. By entering those places and considering the view from within that web, I explored how the renegotiation of apparently fixed meanings of places allows those meanings to become unsettled or reinterpreted.

### ***Documents***

My study begins with documents because policy documents are tangible tools around which policy processes are organised. Policy practitioners treat and create policy documents as tools to shape debate, as starting points to be worked with, and as sources of meaning. There have been a number of attempts to define community cohesion in landmark policy documents, which have become embedded in wider narratives, as I will discuss in Chapter Three. These definitions are used by policy practitioners, not as demonstrations of the 'truth' of what community cohesion is, but as artefacts around which to base their constructions of what community cohesion means. Similarly, I will analyse policy documents not as records of what happened, what is, or what should be; but rather as tools whose production, consumption and use is part of the negotiation of difficult subjects. Thus when I analyse these texts, I do not assume that they present a definition of what the institutional authors believed



community cohesion to be. I suggest instead that they represent an outcome (at a particular point in time) of negotiations around what can and cannot be said about the project of community cohesion, presented in a particular form which is intended to push debate in one direction or another – and which may or may not manage to do so. This treatment of documents follows Foucault's re-conceptualisation of documentary sources as a resource for history which allow scholars to treat the text as *part* of history, rather than simply a (perhaps unreliable, perhaps partial) representation of it (Foucault, 2002 [1969]:6-7).

Much existing work on community cohesion policy analyses policy documents (and press coverage) in similar ways, considering the discourses they use not as records of decisions, but as active attempts to shape understandings, and as embedded in wider discourses and meanings (e.g. Cheong et al, 2007; Fortier, 2007; Yuval-Davis et al, 2005). My work builds on these studies and extends this method, by linking the understanding of documents as tools *and* subjects of analysis, to a consideration of *how* those tools are both constructed and used. Hunter (2008) discusses how policy documents constitute

a meeting point for... multiple perspectives... Their power is not in an ability to communicate a definitive normative truth about the world, but as fictions between what 'is' and what 'might be' (p518).

Likewise, Ahmed (2007) argues that that we should 'follow documents around' (p591) to consider how they are used in practice, as well as considering critically what they say. The space between what organisations do, what they say they do, and how they appear is not just something critical social research can expose, but also something which practitioners may recognise, and which they may use documents to demonstrate (p607). This links back to my discussion of the role of narrative in negotiation – documents present arguments or narratives about how things are or should be; these accounts are produced in order to have a specific effect (Paley, 2009:17). They are tools, but like any tool, they can misfire or be used for other than their intended use. We need to begin with looking at the document to consider its potential uses, but by

stepping outside of the study of documents we can start to consider the other elements of negotiating difficult subjects in practice.

This is why I linked the study of policy documents to ethnography and interviews. However, these other methods themselves produce documents – field notes and interview transcripts – which not only make an account of 'what happened' but also do work on 'what happened', turning it into text, noting some elements and leaving out others (Clifford, 1986; Trouillot, 1995:26). For simplicity's sake, I will discuss these forms of data separately in the following sections, having concentrated here on 'found documents', i.e. policy texts and media coverage, and the way I have gathered and analysed them as data.

Securing the documentary data (policy documents and media sources) to work with was relatively straightforward. General web searches using important key words, the use of online alert services for key words ('Hackney' and 'community cohesion') to identify new web postings, and manual searches of relevant government departments and policy organisations supplemented my existing archive of key documents built up through working in the field. In addition, I secured local policy documents through my existing and continuing work for and collaboration with Hackney Council, while a large amount of other documentation is publicly available for all local authorities and policy organisations via their websites. Appendix One provides an indication of the size of the archive I consulted and analysed; listing only those documents which are directly referenced in the thesis text, it includes 57 separate government reports, speeches or letters; 52 separate media or news items; and 12 additional policy documents (such as those produced by think tanks). In addition, I refer to a number of documents in Chapter Four which are referenced simply as 'internal documents' because they are not publicly available. Analysis of documentary artefacts was useful not only in itself, but also for understanding some of the shared meanings and constructions developed by research participants as observed through interview and ethnographic data. For more details on how I analysed these documents using interpretive methods and coding to organise themes through NVivo (a qualitative data analysis programme), see the *Interviews* section later in this chapter.

### ***Ethnography***

'Ethnography is an act of memory' says Coffey (1999:127), and emphasises that even detailed fieldnotes, or physical mementoes, are tools that enable memory, rather than 'pure' sources themselves. Though my work in Hackney prior to embarking on 'official' PhD research was not framed as an ethnography, it serves as a source of data both for understanding the esoteric knowledges of how local government policy works, and the specific research setting and occupational priorities, behaviours and languages. This experience is supplemented by observations made in and around the process of conducting interviews, including participation in the policy process, attendance at conferences, events and meetings, and informal conversations. These data and experiences helped to produce relationships I would later rely on in fieldwork.

This experience provided me with a 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu, 1990 [1980]:103) of policy practice and institutional life within the organisations of local government and their interactions with other organisational forms. Taking a step outside of this common-sense framework by choosing to study these processes with an element of ethnographic distance was an ongoing process. But it was a constantly iterative one; as I discussed above, the capacity to step outside of the *doxa* is not one only reserved for the self-styled researcher. Thus part of managing the ethnographic work was understanding when research participants were able to suspend the rules of the game (in a way that I understood myself to be doing) to consider its workings and assumptions; and considering to what extent this 'suspension' might itself also be part of 'the game'.

A study with interesting parallels to my approach is the research conducted by Sara Ahmed and her colleagues in the Integrating Diversity Project at the Centre for Excellence in Learning (Ahmed et al, 2006). This involved researchers participating in the production of education diversity policies, and reflecting on their involvement and

the wider field of education diversity policy. Their subsequently published reflections on the experience demonstrate the tensions and frustrations that such 'cross-over' work can entail, particularly in experiencing institutional blockages to change 'from the inside'. But the existence of these reflections demonstrates that new knowledges can be produced through such engagement (Ahmed, 2007a; Hunter, 2008; Swan, 2010). Ahmed and her colleagues were engaged in a research project on the concept and practice of diversity in the learning and skills sector (2006:6). Their approach to the work done by diversity as a concept, rather than 'what diversity is' (p26), mirrors my own approach to the study of community cohesion policy. They also used textual analysis of documents, ethnographic study of the work done through documents (as participant observers), and interviews with diversity practitioners.

The research team engaged in the production of diversity policies, their evaluation and promotion, while trying to maintain their identities as critical social researchers, and also understanding their own positioning within the 'diversity' being governed. They found that their attempts to integrate critical analytical findings into the process of policy and governing met with obstructive responses from the institutions within which they were working (Swan, 2010:494). Though in many ways their project conformed to neoliberal management norms in higher education – high publication outputs, links between research and 'real world' impact – their questioning of the assumptions underlying diversity work seemed too disruptive to be welcomed. Indeed, publication of the report they were initially commissioned to write was apparently blocked for this reason (Hunter, 2008:517). The research team proceeded nonetheless to produce the report in the terms they chose, and indeed to publish a number of academic articles in prestigious journals, reflecting on their positions as insider/outside, and the power dynamics they negotiated as researchers and (quasi-)bureaucrats. Notes they wrote to one another through the research process later became ethnographic data with which to analyse the dynamics of government and feeling within which they had become embroiled.

I began my research unaware of these predecessors, and my experience of institutional power-broking has (so far) been different. However, the value of being a critical

researcher also engaged in policy practice is evident from their publications. Part of my subject matter for this research *has* to be my ethnographic, embodied experience simply because the research process itself has formed part of the negotiation of difficult subjects. My position, like these previous researchers, is deeply embedded in participant observation and an action research, as both projects use critical sociology in the production of policy work – while studying the policy work itself in order to produce new knowledge. My ethnography does this at several levels. Access primarily as a practitioner allowed me to account for my own direct experiences (including affective ones) in Chapter Four. This involvement enabled both privileged access to the research site and an embodied understanding of policy processes, which became data for research as I reflected on the notes, records and memories I had of those experiences, and considered what they could tell us about policy practice.

Participation as a practitioner also allowed me access to privileged materials which might otherwise have been held as confidential, some of which I refer to in Chapter Four as 'internal documents'. I have tried to strike a balance between using these materials as integral to demonstrating the practices I am researching, and maintaining some level of confidentiality with respect to the trust placed in me by research participants, by referring to these documents and events with some level of discretion. As the research was produced in cooperation with colleagues at LBH through my studentship, some of these documents were passed to me specifically because they might be of use to me in my research, and as such I have respected this relationship by using the documents in this way. I have contextualised these documents where I use them as far as is necessary to make sense within the analysis, without adding extraneous details which would only serve to identify individuals. Since the ethnographic work I conducted was, in part, done before I knew it would become research, and because of its nature, I was unable to obtain 'consent' from others who formed part of my experience. For that reason, I have tried to ensure that the discussions which are based on participant observation do not identify any specific people who had not agreed to be included in the study at some point.

## ***Interviews***

*Uncomfortable positions* emerge when reflexive subjects are faced by contradictions between their taken-for-granted understandings of the world and their empirical experiences. The interview encounters I engineered often enabled policy practitioners to occupy such uncomfortable positions, whereas in day-to-day life (as studied through the ethnographic component of this research), they might have less time to dwell on these positions, because of the demands of fulfilling professional duties. This is not to say that such discomforts were not present in daily interactions, just that a space to examine and elaborate on them was created in the interview encounter.

Interviews gave participants an opportunity to reflect on, as well as to engage in, these negotiations. I treat the interview encounters as constructed space in which I take seriously what the interviewees say. I do not dismiss their arguments as simple self-justifications ('they would say that, wouldn't they'). But nor do I take the interview transcript as a straightforward explanation of 'how it really is'. Rather, taking seriously the interview encounter means understanding it as a negotiation, in which both interviewer and interviewee reflect on *and reproduce* elements of the policy- and self-making process. Interviews thus provide concentrated access to such negotiations in process, rather than an unquestioned explanation of the situation 'from the horse's mouth'.

The creation of framed research encounters is partly related to an attempt to systematise research. Paying attention to these frames and how they are breached (rather than leaving this out of, or unspoken in, the analysis) can help to highlight some of their analytical implications. For example, Coffey describes how bumping into participants outside her research site made clear to her the contrast with how she presented herself when 'on duty' as researcher, and the way she had constructed this, bodily and emotionally. It also drew attention to the constructed nature of professional/personal relationships within the research site and the limits of them beyond the research – and hence her role as a specific kind of outsider (Coffey,

1999:53). For me, the interview encounter produced a particular kind of frame in which personal narratives of self were produced by participants, and perhaps more emphasised than in their daily work. It was a separate space from daily ethnography, set aside to consider the construction of policy practice from a different angle. This is not to say that the accounts I was given were more authentic because personal. Rather, they demonstrate how participants found a mode of talking about policy issues when one-to-one, and that they used personal narratives both to remake themselves and to claim a form of authenticity often associated with the confessional account.

It is not my intention to privilege an 'authentic self' or to use the interview method as a confessional tool through which this self is revealed. Rather, if we accept Atkinson and Silverman's (1997) critique of the 'interview society', then we might also note their contention that the treasuring of self-presentation in popular culture and social science is a 'social fact'. That is, it is a phenomenon that can be studied. As they note, there is a difference between 'biographical sociology and the sociology of biographical work' (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997:322), in which they esteem the latter but accuse the former of lacking analytical rigour. In my interview data, it is the *biographical work* that I am interested in. The negotiations that policy practitioners make to comprehend and to re-present difficult subjects in terms they find manageable and acceptable very often involve work on their own biography and its re-presentation as narrative, connected to and orienting narratives of policy. In Rose's terms, this is a 'focus not on what language *means* but on what it *does*' (1998:178).

The main body of data in the thesis is formed of 85 interviews with 'policy practitioners' (see Appendix Two for the range of policy practitioners I interviewed;; Appendix Three provides a quick reference to the roles of those quoted within the text). Though the choice of interview participants was my own, I sought guidance and cooperation from 'gate-keepers' whose endorsement helped me to identify myself as a legitimate researcher, as well as triangulating my own views on who the relevant people within an organisation or locality might be. Within Hackney, my CASE studentship status, as well as my previous work history there, meant that I was already aware of institutional structures and key organisations and departments. I had worked

with many of the people I interviewed there in the past, though not necessarily in relation to community cohesion. For those who I did not know, my endorsement by the Assistant Chief Executive involved in my research studentship provided an institutional imprimatur, as did my use of a Hackney Council email address to arrange the interviews. Only one person I approached for an interview in Hackney declined to be involved.

When approaching national organisations and other local authorities, I also used my association with Hackney and my local government email address (provided as part of my CASE studentship arrangements) as a way of reassuring potential participants of the validity of my project. With each of the three additional case study areas, I found that the most effective way to gain access was again through an initial gatekeeper. These were each identified in different ways, again capitalising on my existing relationships, career and biography. The first contact with Oldham was made by meeting an Assistant Director at a local government conference in London where he was making a presentation on their developing local approach to community cohesion, with a community organiser from Oldham who I also later interviewed. I was able to attend this event as a result of my existing local government connections, and to speak to the Assistant Director in the tea break and follow this up with email and phone contact which led to seven interviews with policy practitioners in Oldham.

In Barking and Dagenham and Peterborough, I was less reliant on a single gatekeeper for each, but again would have found access much harder without my existing background, knowledge and resources. The first contact I made in Barking and Dagenham was through a research participant from a think tank (who incidentally I knew personally before interviewing). He had conducted research on community cohesion there and gave me details of policy practitioners he had met within the local authority. Through this information, I did manage to meet with the local authority lead on community cohesion, but this did not result in the same level of cooperation in securing further interviews as elsewhere. Instead, using my knowledge of the functioning of local authorities and local strategic partnerships, I identified a number of people holding key positions locally and arranged to meet with them, also asking each



of them if there were other people they thought it would be useful for me to interview. Finally, in Peterborough I was able to contact a member of the (by then concluded) national Commission on Integration and Cohesion (COIC), who worked locally, through my academic supervisor who had also participated in the COIC. I also identified the local lead on community cohesion through the LSP's website, and obtained his help in securing six interviews in total with policy practitioners in Peterborough who were involved in community cohesion.

The majority of those working at the national level were in organisations that had a specific remit to work with or on behalf of local government or on community cohesion policy, or organisations that were in the process of developing their own research and positions on community cohesion policy (I am thinking here particularly of some of the think tanks I visited). Many were as interested in understanding my research project as a source of knowledge for themselves, as in providing data for me. With most of these organisations, my local government and university credentials, my association with two leading academics in the field as my doctoral supervisors, and in some cases my previous work or personal acquaintance with them, seemed to identify me as a friendly researcher and my project as one they were interested in participating in and hearing more from. For other organisations though (I am thinking here particularly of more 'right-leaning' think tanks) these connections did not work so well, and may have served as a barrier to access.

Often, research participants seemed nervous in interviews, some telling me so explicitly. Part-way through an interview, even the most senior executives might ask 'Is this alright? Is this what you wanted?', or apologise for 'rambling on'. At these moments I sought to reassure them that I did not have a model answer which I 'wanted' them to give, and that I was glad that they were leading the conversation in the directions that were most relevant to them. The other reason for nervousness from participants might have been a suspicion that I could have had 'ulterior motives'. Through my initial written requests for interviews and my introduction to the interview when we met I sought to reassure interviewees that my recordings and transcripts would not be shared with anyone in the organisation, that extracts used in my research

would be anonymised and that if interviewees wished any specific comments to remain completely confidential they had only to say so. I also explained that the research was to understand policy practitioners' varying understandings of community cohesion policy, and not an exercise to find 'right answers' or 'best practice' – or bad practice. Nevertheless, the 'audit culture' of local authorities is strong, and though no one said so directly, I did feel that in some cases my presence was seen as potentially a 'checking up' or auditing exercise. That said, the questions I asked would have been unusual for an exercise in management auditing.

The interviews were semi-structured and based around four broad questions:

- How would you describe community cohesion policy? / What is your understanding of community cohesion policy?
- (How) has community cohesion policy and its development affected the work that you do?
- How do you think community cohesion policy will develop in the future?
- People often describe community cohesion policy as being about identity, background and experiences; do you think your own identity, background or experience affect how you think about cohesion policy?

For each of these areas of questioning I had a number of related prompts in case the thrust of the questions were unclear to interviewees or they were hesitant to expand. In most cases, however, these broad questions prompted initial responses which I could follow up with more reactive questions. I tried, as far as possible, to follow the directions of discussion which seemed most relevant to the interviewee, while keeping in mind the structure and focus of the interview. For instance, if an interviewee began talking about what might seem a relatively unrelated issue of policy, or their own experiences in a previous job, I would follow their line of thought but if necessary provide prompts or questions relating this back to the main line of questioning. Because of this reactive style of interviewing, in different interviews the amount of time spent on each area of interest would differ.

The final question listed (how one's own identity, background or experiences informed thinking about community cohesion) was added after six pilot interviews, where

participants had talked unprompted about their own experiences in relation to their understanding of cohesion policy. Reviewing the pilot interviews, I saw that this was an important area of investigation, and decided to incorporate a specific question to tease out more reflections on it. I spent some time considering the wording of this question, and while I did not always stick exactly with the script for all of the questions (e.g. perhaps adapting some of the vocabulary to that which had already been used by an interviewee, or elaborating on aspects of the question if they were unclear), the language of 'identity, background or experience' was an important combination. The broad interpretations this made possible are common to the language of much community cohesion policy documentation, which tends to avoid the language of 'equality categories' (such as gender, race or sexuality), instead using terms with which 'everyone' can identify (e.g. COIC, 2007:4). I did not want to subscribe to the idea that those identified with 'unmarked' categories such as male or white are unaffected by questions of gender or race, and wanted interviewees to feel as comfortable as possible to relate their own viewpoints whatever these might be, whilst allowing them to choose whether this was expressed by drawing on identity politics, ethical commitments, material events, some other formation, or a combination of these. While some interviewees expressed surprise or embarrassment at this question initially (one reason why I couched it with the preface that this was especially relevant to cohesion policy), most had already begun to answer it with comments throughout the interview, to which I would sometimes refer back as prompts if they struggled. However, I also gave interviewees the opportunity to say that they did not see how any of these issues affected their understandings of cohesion policy, and some did say this.

As I have discussed, the transcripts became documents, and I paid attention to the process that went into creating them. I understood the conversations I recorded as encounters in a specific, created research encounter. When analysing the language used by both me and the people I was interviewing, I tried to view it in this context, and to consider hesitations, intonation and laughter, for example, as part of the process of performance and conveying of meaning. In this sense my analysis was influenced by traditions of conversation analysis (Silverman, 1998). This was an influence or epistemological starting point, rather than a strict prescriptive method. I

used inductive understandings and communicative strategies to develop my analysis, and demonstrate the reasons for my analysis and conclusions with close reference to the transcript texts, as you will see throughout the thesis.

I have contextualised the data to the extent that it makes sense within my analysis (for instance, describing the professional role or other characteristics of an interviewee), while not providing additional unnecessary information which would only serve to identify individual research participants. All of the names of interviewees have been changed (except for two who were expressly interviewed as public figures and who gave consent to be named – see Chapter Five). Where an interviewee asked me not to attribute specific comments to them, I either took further measures to obscure their identity, or avoided using the material altogether. I obtained consent (written or verbal) from every participant I interviewed; I anonymised the interviews; I explained the purpose of the research both in writing before the interview and verbally when we met.

The majority of the interviews I conducted were with one research participant, though five were with two people at once, and I also recorded one focus group-style meeting with a larger number of participants. The typical interview lasted around an hour, though they ranged between half an hour and almost two hours. I recorded all of these events with a digital voice recorder, except for one interview where the participant preferred not to be recorded and where I took detailed notes as we talked. Immediately after every interview I made detailed notes on the context, body language, and any elements of the interaction that had struck me as particularly important at the time. I later transcribed all of the interviews myself, taking account of all pauses, stutters and exclamations. The process of transcribing enabled me to think back over the interviews and become intimate with the large amount of data I had collected. This way, I avoided the fragmentation of data that can be a risk of relying on qualitative data analysis programmes, retaining my overview of themes and my ability to recognise subtle resonances and use intuitive and inductive strategies for analysis (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000:68).

As a way of organising my data, I created 'codes' for the themes that emerged from the data, both from interview transcripts and other documentary sources. These codes were created and administered within the qualitative data analysis programme NVivo, which made it possible to systematically apply these codes to the transcripts as I re-read each one in turn. In the process of coding, further themes emerged inductively and I created new codes for them to help to organise the data. In all, I had 93 different codes by the end of this process. For an idea of how I handled these codes, the first five in my NVivo file when organised alphabetically were '2001 riots, Oldham, Bradford, Burnley'; 'age as diversity'; 'barking [and dagenham]'; 'beneath the surface'; 'bnp, far right'.

Reviewing these five codes gives a reasonable idea of the complexities of this coding strategy. Firstly, the codes were created inductively and were shorthand for my own use, thus they did not necessarily form fully fleshed-out analytic categories that I would use in my final write-up. Secondly, they are a mixture of types of ideas, based on the formations that emerged from the data. For example the first code listed here ('2001 riots, Oldham, Bradford, Burnley') is a cluster around narratives of the emergence of community cohesion policy which comes out consistently in the data and is located in time and space. The second (age as diversity) is a way of talking about diversity by reference to age, which emerged as a tactic in some data for demonstrating that community cohesion policy was not simply based in race and faith – yet in the end this was not a strong enough theme to be discussed at length in the thesis. The third (barking) is a place which came up frequently in narratives of community cohesion policy and which I subsequently pursued as a theme of the research by developing the methodology to investigate perspectives from within that place; the fact that in my own shorthand I left off 'Dagenham' may be revealing of my own lack of attention to the specificities of place, but also to the ways that interviewees in particular might talk more about one than the other part of the local authority in Barking and Dagenham. The fourth code (beneath the surface), is a category I created to group together narratives that seemed to form around themes of unspoken tensions, when practitioners or documents alluded to cohesion as potentially just 'on the surface', with more sinister or difficult subjects concealed or silenced. This

code included a variety of different subjects, constructed within resonant narrative forms. The final code listed here (bnp, far right) refers to narratives and allusions to the British National Party and other far right groups which were identified in some sources as specific, or primary, threats to cohesion.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that as I went through this coding process, much of my data was given several different codes. A different methodology might have investigated systematic correlations between codes (Fielding, 2002:165) – but my coding system was not a tool to scientise or quantify this data on narratives and meaning. I coded the data as a way of sorting and thinking about it, of organising my thoughts and interpretations, and so where codes overlap I have discussed these associations in my analysis, but I do not pretend this shows some independent variable at work, because of course all of the codes themselves and their application emerge from my own inductive decisions.

The processes of transcribing, reading and coding the around 1,000,000 words of transcript material made me extremely familiar both with the detail of the material, and its broader themes. When thinking about emerging themes throughout the analysis process, I was able to refer back to the coded archive to locate material I remembered as significant. Having the archive organised in this way also enabled me to re-read juxtaposed sets of interview material from different participants, thereby creating a different context for pieces of data than when embedded in their own individual interview transcripts.

### ***Conclusions***

In this chapter I have highlighted how uncomfortable positions and difficult subjects arise throughout the thesis. Sometimes this is related to the use of language, the differences between what is said, implied and understood. I have suggested that ambiguity itself should be understood as a tool or technique of governmentality (as

discussed in Chapter One). As such, my research strategy takes the study of policy off the page, and into the practices, negotiations and *uses* of policy documents and their ambiguities by using participant observation and semi-structured interviews with policy practitioners where they are given the space to reflect on their policy practice by stepping slightly outside of their everyday negotiations.

As I have argued, the interviews and other forms of data I have gathered and analysed in the thesis are in themselves negotiations, as is my own work as both researcher and practitioner. This should not be seen wholly cynically, as if participants are simply trying to show themselves in the 'best' light. As I will discuss later in the thesis (see especially Chapter Seven), many practitioners demonstrated deep commitments to their work even as they suggested they might fall short of their own ideals. This presentation itself is a strategy of negotiation of identity and narrative, but while throughout the thesis I have considered participants' presentation of themselves as fundamentally related to power structures and their own positioning within them, I have also sought to take their narratives seriously. In particular, I have refused the (perhaps more comfortable) option of drawing a firm line between 'policy' and 'sociology' which would suggest that the two worlds have access to fundamentally different knowledges or perspectives. Rather I have emphasised that these worlds are connected, but that operating primarily within one or the other influences what *purposes* knowledge or techniques might be put to at a particular moment.

The connections between these two imagined worlds are emphasised by my own position as both practitioner and sociologist. I have discussed the negotiations that this entailed in conducting my research, the benefits it had in terms of access, analysis and insights, and the potential difficulties in maintaining analytical distance and independence. To a great extent, the conduct of the research had many parallels with the subject of analysis. That is, the very action of developing this research project draws into question the roles and identities of both researcher and participant, while it is the actual *practices* of these actors, and their meanings, that are of interest. This parallels one of the main threads of the research question, about what it means *to govern*, and how this is best understood by attention to the actions of those engaged in

governing. As I will discuss at greater length in the empirical chapters, building relationships of trust (in order to influence action) appears to be at the heart of governing, and doing so requires both technical and emotional skill. Very similar processes are at work in building research relationships.

These relationships between individuals are of course always experienced within structures of differential power. As I have emphasised, the attention my research strategy gives to emotions as part of the process of governing is not intended to obscure or mask power relations. Rather, it is a recognition that *power relations and structures are lived through emotional reactions*. Emotional labour is used in the processes of governing, and expected in the responses of those being governed. This is also true of the process of research. And emotional effects are often found within, and exercised through, narratives which make sense of society or are used to persuade in one way or another. The power of narrative (and how narratives shape as well as embody what is said and what remains silent) is central to the thesis, both its analysis and its subject matter. By following narratives, I have developed a research design that follows the meanings of places and in relation to one another and to the practice of governing. In the next chapter, I will begin to explore where this narrative-based research strategy and the concentration on how narratives are used has taken me.



## Chapter Three: Contradictory narratives of cohesion

### *Introduction*

In this chapter I explore narratives of community cohesion policy. The term community cohesion (policy) can be, and is, used in various ways. Sometimes 'community cohesion' is used to describe an existing condition, or a condition that is being aspired to. At other times 'community cohesion' (or its lack) is treated as a cause of other conditions (such as educational achievement or poverty). Thirdly, building on both or either of these meanings, a set of actions to engender community cohesion can be prescribed by commentators as required in a particular situation. Finally, 'community cohesion' can be treated as a political construct, and it is largely in that sense that I use it here and throughout the thesis. This is the reason that I mostly refer to 'community cohesion *policy*', because this emphasises a whole set of ideas (including the descriptive, causal, and prescriptive listed above) which are collected together and given the label 'community cohesion' as part of constructing a legible policy narrative (or, as we shall see, multiple narratives). Part of the power (and the difficulty) of using (or analysing) this sort of concept is that the phrase 'community cohesion (policy)' so easily slips between these types of meaning.

Prescriptive, technocratic policy documents treat community cohesion as an object or condition which can be measured, as in the first two senses outlined here (e.g. DCLG, 2007b). Attempts to map community cohesion policy as a policy prescription (the third sense outlined above) sometimes present a chronology of important moments and documents in its development, which illustrate that approaches have changed over time (e.g. Cattle, 2005; see also the Institute of Community Cohesion's archive at <http://www.cohesioninstitute.org.uk/Resources/AboutCommunityCohesion>). There is a developing literature critiquing such unproblematised chronologies, and policy definitions of community cohesion (e.g. Burnett, 2004, 2007; Kalra, 2002; Khan, 2007; McGhee, 2003, 2005; Robinson, 2005, 2008). This literature begins to consider community cohesion policy as a political construct. However, in the main it has

depended on archival discourse analysis of policy documents, which stops short of attention to my particular interest in the resonances and contradictions of how policy is understood, practised and lived (see also Bonnett, 1993:180; Husband and Alam, 2011:13; Solomos and Back, 1995:xi).

In an attempt to do justice to the overlaps, ambiguities, resonances and silences of how people – especially policy practitioners – make sense of community cohesion policy, I have framed this chapter around *narratives*. That is, the data I have gathered suggests four groupings of ideas through which different aspects of community cohesion policy are imagined. These four sets of ideas are not separate – indeed to some extent they depend on each other. But they are best understood as four connected stories about existing or past problems with community, future solutions, the places where these occur, the relationships to power and difference of the populations and places involved, and how to manage them. What is included or excluded from each of these narratives is important, as is who constructs the narratives, how and why; and how the narratives (with their silences) are used (Keith and Pile, 1993:37; Trouillot, 1995:26).

In detailed work on British political and media constructions of 'young black men', John Solomos has shown how policies 'construct definitions of the problems to be tackled which exclude certain issues from serious consideration' (1988:142), where 'coded terms' such as 'urban problems and 'pressure on services' are used to talk about violence and disorder, and about race (p105; see also Hall et al, 1978). But it is also important to note how these coded terms shift over time and context (Solomos and Back, 1995:xi). For instance, Bagguley and Hussain (2003b:3) read official reports on community cohesion as 'an "index" of changing racialised discourses' that reflect shifting government attitudes to community. And my research is most of all concerned with how *awareness* of these codings is practised. Once we recognise that policy practitioners, journalists and citizens may be aware, to various extents, of the coding or silencing they are doing or receiving, matters take on another order of complexity. Community cohesion policy is a particularly good example of this because (at least in some of its formulations) the difficulties of communication about 'sensitive issues' are

at its heart (Cantle, 2001:18; Lewis, 2005:555).

This chapter narrates the landscape of cohesion with geographically anchored reference points. This is a figurative landscape; it is imagined from material geographies, but only partly related to their lived experience (Keith and Pile, 1993:6). Each of the four overlapping policy narratives demonstrates a relationship between community cohesion (the problem, description, cause or prescription) imagined through place ('they' experience community cohesion problems 'over there', but 'we' do not have problems 'here'); and imagined through time (problems of the past which have now been solved, or problems of the present which never used to exist). Barnor Hesse has written about how imagining such problems as 'elsewhere' and of a different (past) era is typical of a colonising, Eurocentric approach which imagines the position of the speaker/viewer/analyst/governor to be superior, modern, and central (and those they view to be inferior, primitive and marginal) (Hesse, 1993:175). The narratives I discuss here are partial. I am not claiming to tell the whole story, but to provide some context for how community cohesion policy is thought and performed in national and local policy practice.

The first narrative centres on the (familiar) idea of the unfamiliar Other, and how community cohesion policy has become closely associated with ideas of 'parallel lives', much discussed following the reports of inquiries into violent disturbances in northern English towns and cities in the summer of 2001. In more recent developments, associations of the 'alien other' have shifted to focus on a newer 'folk devil': the young Muslim (Asian) man (Alexander, 2000, 2004). Religious labelling of the outsider was less central to the initial stages of community cohesion policy, but following attacks on New York and Washington later in 2001, and the ensuing 'war on terror', Islam has become increasingly problematised in community cohesion policy and its associated programmes (Husband and Alam, 2011:2).

The second set of coordinates locates a different folk devil – the 'white working class'. This term has become associated with nationalistic racism and particularly with electoral successes of the British National Party (BNP) in the 2000s. This framing of

debate allows racism to be situated with the white working class, outside or on the outskirts of London, and not in the capital city's middle-class, multicultural, metropolitan centre (Skeggs, 2005a:972). It also demonises and homogenises a section of society as backward and violently racist outsiders from the body politic and the national 'shared value' of 'tolerance' (Haylett, 2001:357; Hewitt, 2005:53).

Thirdly, nostalgic ideals of national identity in Britain and specifically in England have long been associated with ideas of the countryside and rural landscapes and their links to idealised 'whiteness' (Chakraborti, 2010; Chakraborti and Garland, 2004; Garland and Chakraborti, 2006; Keith, 2005:33; Neal, 2002:443; Stedman Jones, 1989:311; Williams, 1973:7). Consequently, 'problems' for community cohesion were framed around how existing resident populations would 'cope' with increases in migration following the accession of new countries to the EU in 2004, particularly in areas previously unused to migrant or ethnic minority presence. Such areas become the focus for narratives of both a nostalgically imagined 'authentic' English identity, and debates about what multicultural could and should mean, particularly in changing contexts of power and difference.

Finally, I turn to a narrative of celebratory urban multicultural. The previous three narratives created racialised others, and situated the discrimination to which they were subjected within particular bodies and places (non-cosmopolitan, rural or provincial white working class – or self-segregating ethnic minorities). They imagined places and populations lacking in community cohesion (in different ways). The final set of coordinates imagines a Britain that is cosmopolitan and multicultural, an image which does not overtake but sits alongside the other shifting referents of Britishness/Englishness. In this context, the inner city, previously imagined as a place of danger associated with poverty, crime, deviance and migration becomes celebrated for its association with difference and change (Bonnett, 2010:129; Keith, 2005:121). The narrative of long-standing histories of welcoming newcomers becomes celebrated as part of the national story, representing 'British values of tolerance'.

These four narratives do not tell a straightforward story of community cohesion policy

and its development. They converge, diverge, contradict and intertwine at various points. In the remainder of this chapter, I will elaborate on each – beginning with their historical resonances, the more contemporary moments that connect these narratives to community cohesion, the policy developments that intersect with each, and the explanation for their associations with an imagined geographic location.

### ***Parallel lives and 'the other'***

#### *History*

Sociology's exploration of 'race' – and how this social category is constructed and lived – moves between assumptions of fundamental difference and their translation into assumptions of cultural differences (see Gilroy, 2000); understanding 'race' as a construction but racism as real (Miles, 1993); understanding racist structural practices as embedded in hegemonic struggle within capitalist society (Hall et al, 1978); the risk that such approaches can reduce understandings of black experience and political mobilisation to victimhood in reaction to racism (Gilroy, 1990); and attempts to integrate understandings of race with other dimensions of difference and oppression (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1983; Brah, 2007). All of these strands of thought enter the policy and popular discourse, to different extents, and in more or less precise forms. Their incommensurabilities do not prevent their coexistence and reappearance. Residues of all of them can be identified in both the policy development literature on community cohesion and in the everyday talk of policy makers discussed later in the thesis.

The history of 'race relations' studies in Britain, the US and Europe has been concerned largely with urban populations, where cities have been places of settlement for international migrants. Classic studies of ghettoisation, spatial segregation, integration and assimilation applied ecological models to measure dispersal and residential separation of racially defined population groups throughout the twentieth century

(Waters and Jiménez, 2005). In some forms, the idea of community cohesion policy as concerned with residential segregation on ethnic lines owes much to the histories of social geography and its development of measures such as the Index of Dissimilarity (Burgess et al, 2005; Finney and Simpson, 2009).

Community cohesion policy was a response to ethnically/racially marked 'riots'. This echoed the urban programmes of the 1980s, and their focus on ethnic residential segregation. But a new inflection of these debates in Britain in the 2000s was that the previous characterisation of 'good' and 'bad' migrant populations was reversed. Instead of African heritage groups being seen as the perpetrators of violence ('having problems') while South Asian groups were caricatured as responsible, quiet, and dedicated to business and family ('having culture') (Bagguley and Hussain, 2003a; Hall et al, 1978; Lewis, 2005:550-2; Solomos, 1988), the 'problem' group or folk devil of the 2000s is the South Asian heritage Muslim, perhaps second or third generation migrant (Alexander, 2000:xiii; MPA, 2007:51), though the 'problems with' Black Britons have by no means disappeared from policy discourse (e.g. see Blair, 2007).

A significant turning point both for government policy on race equality and academic engagement with these issues was the 'moment' of urban riots in the 1980s (Keith, 1993; Solomos, 2003:36). That this 'moment' relates to events over several years is an illustration of how the complex yet mundane realities that led to those uprisings, the events themselves, and their aftermath can become distilled through narrative into 'the 1980s riots'. This phrase then draws in all the resonances and implications of black urban poor, state and casual racism, explosive reactions, and government attempts at post-hoc amelioration – while eluding the specificities of precisely who, how, why and what took place (nor is there room to discuss 'what happened' here; for detailed discussions see Benyon and Solomos, 1987; Keith, 1993; Kettle and Hodges, 1982; Solomos, 1986).

Rhetoric linking public disorder to failed immigration and integration policies contributed to immigration acts limiting the rights of people from former British colonies to enter Britain, alongside race relations and race equalities acts intended to

improve the treatment of those already resident in Britain (Solomos, 2003:80). But racialisation is not only a project applied to those with darker skins (Bonnett, 1998; Miles, 1993) and folk devils are not always imagined through this lens. Though less centrally located in the race relations literature (Mac an Ghaill, 2001), an alternative 'folk devil' of late twentieth century Britain was the 'Irish terrorist', a trope which resonates with early twenty-first century narratives of the 'Muslim suicide bomber' (Nickels et al., 2009). This was a community identified as outsiders by their religion and migrant heritage, and then associated as a whole with the dangers of the Provisional IRA's attacks on mainland Britain and separatist ideology. Longer histories of international domination led to systematic demonisation of the Irish in Britain as a specific danger to 'the nation' throughout the late twentieth century through counter-terrorist legislation, police harassment and popular racisms (Fekete, 2001; Hickman, 1998).

The emergence of Muslim populations as alternative folk devils had its own 'moments' or turning points. These images had already become established before the appearance of community cohesion policy as a government agenda. One of these turning points was the reaction to the publication of Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses*, which was seen as offensive by some Muslim leaders, with copies burnt in protests in Bradford and elsewhere, and a *fatwa* declared on Rushdie in February 1989 (Solomos, 2003:212-3). These events re-energised political debate about multiculturalism, with a greater focus on ethnoreligious difference, integration and gender, problematising (South Asian) Muslims in particular, and prompting political mobilisations within Muslim communities as a specific political force (Solomos, 2003:213-5; Solomos and Back, 1995:150). These were not new issues in British political debate. For example, controversy spilled over in the mid-1980s in reaction to Bradford headteacher Ray Honeyford's outspoken views against anti-racist education relating to the South Asian heritage children attending his school (Ball and Solomos, 1990:13). The first Gulf War, in 1990-1, also helped to congeal 'the idea that there was some kind of unitary Muslim community in Britain that could pose a threat to national identity' (Solomos, 2003:215). Thus the 'quiet and dutiful migrant' caricature attributed to South Asians in Britain had already begun to fade when community cohesion policy

emerged (Fortier, 2007:109; MPA, 2007:51).

### *Contemporary moments*

In 2001, violence broke out on the streets of northern English towns, most notoriously in Oldham (in May), Burnley (in June) and Bradford (in July). The news coverage produced strikingly similar images of burning cars and riot police that instantly drew parallels with 1980s disturbances. Links between the two periods were drawn by policy practitioners (e.g. Cattle, 2005:8), journalists (BBC News, 2001; Darbyshire, 2001) and academics (e.g. Bagguley and Hussain, 2003a; Kalra, 2002). The parallels were not just in the widespread and riotous nature of the disorders but in the involvement of racialised urban populations – this time Asian rather than black – though both sets of disturbances involved white participants too, and in more complex relationships than a simple 'white-against-black' scenario (Bagguley and Hussain, 2003a; Keith, 1993).

The government reports that emerged following the 2001 disorders identified a number of contributory factors for the violence, including economic deprivation, provocation from far right groups, crime and political disenfranchisement (Denham, 2001:8) But their greatest emphasis was on a diagnosis of 'parallel lives', that is, that 'Asian' and 'white' communities were living separate existences and rarely meeting (Cattle, 2001:9; Denham, 2001:13). This again was assigned a number of causes, including systematic discrimination in both public and private housing, and 'white flight' from schools and neighbourhoods, and to the choice of Asian people to live together for safety from discrimination and access to cultural resources (Cattle, 2001:28). The prescription was that 'parallel lives' needed to be addressed by developing greater 'community cohesion'. As the definition of community cohesion and how to achieve it has continued to be debated, there remains a reverberation around this central idea that established migrant communities have remained separated from longer-standing (white) communities in many towns, and that intervention is required to bring these two groups together.



There were four key reports into the 2001 disturbances (Cantle, 2001; Clarke, 2001; Denham, 2001; Ritchie, 2001), and an additional report in Bradford which had been commissioned prior to the events there in July (Ouseley, 2001). A key document which has dominated narratives of community cohesion is that produced by the Independent Review Team chaired by Ted Cantle (Cantle, 2001). This report refers to 'Asians' and 'the Asian community' (alongside the 'white community'), but places less emphasis on the designation 'Muslim' and only refers to 'the Muslim community' within the biographies of some of the review team members. The disturbances occurred weeks before the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Washington on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001, and the subsequent declaration of an international 'war on terror'. The riot reports were being written at that time and published soon after, but it seems that the idea of Muslims as a focus of folk devilry, fear or discrimination was not yet fully crystallized as a concern in policy discourse (though see Ritchie, 2001:10) in the way it became over the following years, with Britain engaging in wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and in the aftermath of bombings on the London transport system in July 2005. Despite official insistence that the Preventing Violent Extremism programme (later Prevent) which emerged following July 2005 was separate to community cohesion initiatives, in practice the two were inextricably linked (see Chapter Four). The explicit targeting of Muslims as having responsibility to 'isolate violent extremist activity', 'identify themselves as a welcome part of British society' and 'actively condemn violent extremism' seems expressly designed to produce an outsider group in opposition to the 'wider British society' (CLG, 2007b:3). These public and policy developments occurred alongside widespread expressions of concern about 'parallel lives' of 'Asians' (now equated with 'Muslims') as too different and separate to cohere with 'the wider population'.

In contrast to responses to civil disturbances in the 1980s which were initially led by the central government department responsible for local government<sup>11</sup> before this leading role shifted by 1985 to the Home Office and consequent associations with law and order (Solomos, 2003:247), the early responses to the 2001 disturbances were produced from the Home Office before moving back alongside community and local

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<sup>11</sup> At that time, the Department of Environment.

government matters.<sup>12</sup> Whereas law and order concerns apparently became more dominant in the 1980s policy responses, in the 2000s the change in departmental responsibility suggests an increasing emphasis on regimes of governmentality and behaviour-shaping activities rather than imposition of control. Increasingly, counter-terrorism measures were also split between these two departments, with Communities and Local Government responsible for 'winning hearts and minds' of British Muslims (DCLG, 2007a), while information-gathering and intervention remained with the security services (HM Government, 2006; 2009a; see also Chapter Four).

As community cohesion policy was shaped by events and policy reactions, the messages about how precisely its relationship to race, racism and ethnicity should be understood also shifted. Despite being discussed as if its main focus was on segregation and separation, the Cantle Report initially positioned community cohesion policy as specifically addressing racialised inequality. It aligned community cohesion work with race equality work, suggesting that local authority Community Cohesion Strategies might be seen as part of meeting the duty to promote equality under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 (Cantle, 2001:21). The team made the first theme of their investigation 'the extent to which race issues are visibly and positively addressed by political/civic/community leadership and diversity is valued' (Cantle, 2001:56). Further, the later Community Cohesion Review Panel which was appointed by the Home Office to provide guidance on the development of community cohesion policy and strategies<sup>13</sup> stated in its final report the 'hope that the statutory duty to "promote good race relations"... will be effectively discharged through the community cohesion agenda and will be regarded... as *synonymous*' (Community Cohesion Review Panel, 2004:57, my emphasis). While these recognitions of the links between community cohesion work and race equality reflect the (implicit and explicit) understandings of many practitioners, most of the other documentation produced by national bodies attempts to separate the two or at least remove the tensions of discussing race issues from community cohesion forums. An early example of this was

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<sup>12</sup> From 2006, the Department of Communities and Local Government.

<sup>13</sup> With some of the same members as the Community Cohesion Review Team that authored the Cantle Report, and again chaired by Ted Cantle.

in the first national guidance on community cohesion programmes: 'Community cohesion incorporates and goes beyond the concept of race equality and social cohesion' (LGA, 2002:6). Precisely *how* it might do so is not made clear.

### *Place*

As described above, the rise of community cohesion policy as an agenda is connected to those places remembered as experiencing disorder in the summer of 2001. Disorder occurred in other places too around this time, and yet other localities with similar characteristics of population, geography and employment patterns escaped serious disturbances. But the three towns which experienced the most significant disorder were the ones that commissioned local investigations into their causes, and received the most national attention. This could be thought of as the process by which the moment of *fact creation* (the making of sources) gives way to the moment of *fact assembly* (the making of archives) (Trouillot, 1995:26; see also Wemyss, 2008). At each of these stages, some elements of history are remembered or privileged as facts, whilst others are silenced. Oldham, Burnley and Bradford in this process are recorded as places of parallel lives where attempts to find community cohesion are tested. They take an anchoring role from which the community cohesion policy narrative starts,<sup>14</sup> as community cohesion is retold (the moment of *fact retrieval*). Silences and fact creation can manifest at any of these overlapping moments, or at the fourth, the moment of *retrospective significance*, the making of history 'in the final instance'.

Whether or not history is ever fixed 'in the final instance', the retrospective significance of community cohesion policy is not (yet). However, its association with this constellation of northern English towns remains, in their presentation at a national level through, for example, policy documents, conferences and media coverage (by both locals and outside commentators). Their names have, to different extents, become shorthand for ideas of segregated communities of South Asian Muslims and 'the white working class'. The transformation of cohesion agendas by connection with

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example <http://www.cohesioninstitute.org.uk/Resources/AboutCommunityCohesion>

anti-terrorism re-inflects these resonances, as do the broad West Yorkshire accents of the bombers of July 2005, who grew up as British Asian Muslims in nearby towns (Back, 2007a). The broader narrative this is used to construct is of northern England as a place where multiculturalism has failed – where migration of the mid-twentieth century stalled in its normative progress towards integration. This fits with the post-industrial landscape of popular films (for example, *This is England* (2006), *East is East* (1999), *My Son the Fanatic* (1997)) which imagine a quasi-nostalgic, generalised provincial England stuck in the past of post-industrial hopelessness and depressed racism – in contrast to the superdiverse cosmopolitan harmony of Tony Blair's *Cool Britannia* (read London) (Bonnett, 2010:130). Thus 'that' England of parallel lives is imagined as both spatially and temporally outside of the heart of government and power – and therefore simply unable to keep up, rather than left behind (as a consequence of others racing ahead). But this is not the only narrative which links places, events and times to a model of failed community cohesion.

### ***'The white working class': locating racism with the other Other***

#### *History*

The second set of coordinates from which to trace narratives of community cohesion policy similarly locates problems outside, and in the past of, the centres from which such histories are told. The twist this time is that this is not a trope of an invading other, but a relic of the past, the 'white working class' unable to adjust to a globalised world and therefore threatening national cohesion by a racist rejection of contemporary values.

The simple narrative is that Britain as a whole has become more at ease with itself as a post-imperial nation now able to celebrate its internal diversity. Racism and discrimination which were previously everyday have become unacceptable, indeed in many forms illegal. The exception to this is the 'white working class', who are portrayed

as either ignorantly racist or as articulating what others are too afraid to say: that 'multiculturalism has gone too far'. Either way, this figure enables a narrative in which racism has been eliminated from the nation but is still allowed to be spoken in response to concerns associated with this both marginalised and demonised figure.

Significant moments removing the acceptability of racist speech from the national discourse include the outrageous racism of Conservative slogans in the 1964 general election campaign in Smethwick<sup>15</sup> and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's 1978 comments about her fear of Britain becoming 'swamped by people with a different culture' (quoted in Solomos, 2003:177). These moments were significant not just in demonstrating xenophobia and racism at the heart of mainstream politics, but also in mobilising a critique of it (Solomos, 2003:69). Similarly, that extreme far right views were both present as a force in electoral politics, and a threat that could be defeated, was demonstrated by the election of the first British National Party (BNP) racist councillor in the UK in Tower Hamlets in 1993 and subsequent refusal of officers and elected members to cooperate with him, which with concerted efforts from local activists led to his removal (Wemyss, 2009:95).

Another significant element in this narrative is the idea of a 'backlash' from poor white communities already marginalised within capitalism and then threatened by labour competition from immigration; or, more recently, framed as neglected by the state in the privileging of ethnic minorities through equalities policies and 'state multiculturalism'. This framing of concerns about immigration as spoken on behalf of the already economically excluded is most graphically remembered with reference to Enoch Powell's infamous speeches (Solomos, 2003:61), but was also present in the vociferous attacks on anti-racist education throughout the 1980s (see various essays in Ball and Solomos, 1990; Hewitt, 2005:119). These historic resonances are not necessarily place-based, except in that they call on images of both industrial and inner city working populations struggling within competitive labour markets, and (less often) of agricultural or pastoral England/Britain.

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<sup>15</sup> Most notoriously, 'if you want a nigger neighbour vote Labour', a slogan the candidate refused to condemn (Solomos and Back, 1995:54).

### *Contemporary moments*

If racism is now seen as unspeakable in public life, it is in large part due to outraged reactions – not just to the speech acts of politicians described above or institutional or banal racisms, but to specific incidents which have captured public and political imaginations. Perhaps the most significant of these events was the racist murder of a black teenager, Stephen Lawrence, in Eltham, south east London in 1993. The murder investigation was repeatedly compromised and, following an independent inquiry, this was found to be the result of institutional racism of the Metropolitan Police Service (MacPherson, 1999). A direct result of this was the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, which created a positive duty for public bodies to promote race equality. The strongly-worded outrage in the popular media at the racist nature of the murder and the collapse of criminal trials against the perpetrators was significant in demonstrating the unspeakability of racism (Hewitt, 2005:52).

Yet this condemnation was explicitly narrated through class. 'White working class' housing estates become, in this narrative, the site of racist violence, condemnation of which enables the rest of society to claim its anti-racist credentials. As Roger Hewitt puts it, the 'message was that in looking for racism in the UK there was no need to look further' (2005:53). This enabled the statutory requirements of the 2000 Act and analyses of institutional racism to be called into question from a position of condemning racism – by locating it outside of institutions. Alongside this, there is a discourse which suggests (repeatedly) that 'political correctness' is now hegemonic – an argument now made on the left of the political spectrum as well as the right (Ahmed, 2005). This counter-narrative is tiringly familiar in its echoes of the attacks on multiculturalism and anti-racism through the 1980s, mentioned above, and now apparently given a spur by the incorporation of greater race equality measures in law.

But political and media attention to the 'white working class' is not simply about characterising an incorrigibly and violently racist group. It is about designating them as

a victimised and marginalised group whose racism is a reaction to their situation; about positing a resentment of attention they are said to feel is given to every disadvantaged group but them (Bottero, 2009:7; Gillborn, 2008:22; Hewitt, 2005:57; Ware, 2008; Wells and Watson, 2005). The category of 'white working class' is problematic particularly because the conjunction of race and class silences a proper analysis of inequality in either form. Indeed, the lack of clear specification of what actually constitutes being 'white working class' clouds the debate, particularly when statistics claiming to demonstrate disadvantage are invoked (Gillborn, 2008). The 'working class' label enables a claim to victimhood in economic terms, while the 'white' label enables the blame to be placed with government policies which are seen to champion only the ethnic 'other' (Hewitt, 2005:126-7). Conversely, using the term 'white working class' to designate 'others' presumes a racialised and probably racist element to (white) working class resentment, and hence to some extent discredits it. The 'working class' element serves to distance the (middle class) commentator from such presumed racism and to create a constitutive outside for their own blameless (race and) class privilege (Garner, 2008:47; Haylett, 2001:365; Reay, 2008:1081). In terms of community cohesion discourse, having been coded as resentful, racist and backward-looking, the 'white working class' are constituted as outside the national community of shared norms and values:

[W]hat we all have in common is a desire to build a strong society where civility and courtesy are the norm, where people are at ease with change, and are committed to being good neighbours and active citizens. (COIC, 2007:3)

Government policy on anti-social behaviour, at one point framed as 'the Respect Agenda', extends this class-based racialisation of the perpetrators of un-cohesive acts as abject and outside the national community (Haylett, 2001:357). In this case the creation of an 'other' from the urban poor does not restrict itself to a visibly identifiable ethnic group. Rather, 'troublemakers' can come from any racial or ethnic group in this discourse, indeed, theoretically, from any class background (Respect Task Force, 2006). But the popular image is that they are more likely to be white, poor, young and male (Burney, 2005; though see Isal, 2006 on the lack of data on this). The

enforcement of sanctions for anti-social behaviour through the Respect Agenda was largely related to social housing rights, and controls over freedom of movement, making it most relevant to those living in social housing. 'Respect' was an initiative largely developed and analysed separately from community cohesion policy, yet its associated rhetoric of a 'majority of law-abiding, decent people' threatened by 'the few individuals and families that think they do not have to show respect to others' (Respect Task Force, 2006:1) mirrors the narrative of a cohesive community of consensus threatened only by those who stray from the norm. The rise in electoral support for the far right serves a similar purpose for the political 'mainstream', allowing opposition to racism to be focused on these 'others', rather than confronting ways that inequalities are embedded in the bigger political parties.

In 2002, the BNP won two council seats in Burnley, and over successive years increased the number of local council seats they held to a peak in 2008 of 37 across England and Wales (as well as gaining two seats in the European Parliament and one on the Greater London Authority in 2009). Though a very small number of the around 20,000 local council seats across the country, the significance of the BNP's electoral success was not just that they had become sufficiently respectable to secure a viable voting base in some areas. The transformation was also visible in their increasing acceptance as a respectable political party by other major parties and the national media. Though still treated as more exceptional than fascist parties elsewhere in Europe, the appearance of the party's leader on BBC Question Time alongside leading politicians from all main political parties,<sup>16</sup> and the cooperation of authorities to which they have been elected contrasts with the dismay at the first elected BNP official in Tower Hamlets in 1993.

Following this electoral resurgence of the BNP, the calls that 'multiculturalism', equalities work and community cohesion policy were 'playing into the hands of the BNP' were reinforced, not least by the BNP's own positioning of itself as standing up for a marginalised section of society (Back, 2002:36; Copsey, 2008; Keith, 2008a; Williams and Keith, 2006). Explicitly in reaction to this tendency, Communities Secretary John Denham announced the Connecting Communities fund at an event at the Institute for

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<sup>16</sup> Question Time, BBC1, 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2009.



Community Cohesion in October 2009. Like the Preventing Violent Extremism Fund, the justifications and purpose given for this initiative appeared to contradict themselves, and broader government strategy on community cohesion. Like PVE, Connecting Communities was aimed at a specific group – in this case 'hard working families' in 'predominantly white areas' who 'say "it's not my community any more". And feel helpless to do anything about it.' (Denham, 2009) (rather than 'Muslims in our communities' who should 'identify themselves as a welcome part of a wider British society' (CLG, 2007b:3)). Connecting Communities was aimed at 'addressing the legitimate fears and concerns which, neglected, can prove fertile territory for extremism' (Denham, 2009) (rather than 'isolat[ing] violent extremist activity' (CLG, 2007b:3)). Both the Connecting Communities and PVE funds aimed to encourage specified groups to feel more enfranchised by state investment, while in doing so attaching a stigma to them as a therefore problematic group (Kundnani, 2009; Turley, 2009). This also seemed at odds with the broader recommendations of the Commission on Cohesion and Integration that "'Single Group Funding" should be the exception rather than the rule' (COIC, 2007:160, see also later in this chapter, and Chapter Four).

The difficult subject that proponents of the Connecting Communities fund and other politicians and policy practitioners are trying to negotiate is to find a balance between understanding the existence of, and reasons for, discontent among particular sectors of the population, without appearing to pander to racism (or extremism). The problem is that many communities (identified as 'white working class' or otherwise) have found themselves without satisfactory employment, education, or (significantly) housing (Williams and Keith, 2006). That for many it has become easier to blame immigration and ethnic minorities for one's own misfortune than to seek solidarity with others who are similarly disadvantaged makes this negotiation all the more difficult. Entering this difficult space means entering the 'gray zone' of attempts at understanding discrimination without condoning it, as described by Les Back (2002).

### *Place*

Though Burnley was the first place to elect BNP councillors in this wave of their electoral success, it is Barking and Dagenham that has become most associated with this narrative of disgruntled 'white working class' communities turning to the far right. Barking and Dagenham had the largest BNP group on its Council, with 12 councillors between 2006 and 2010.<sup>17</sup> Though it remained an overwhelmingly Labour Council, the BNP was the most successful electoral opposition the local party had seen for some time. The borough came to symbolise, for both the national press and policy practitioners across the country, the problem of far right mobilisation among the 'white working class'.

As an outer London borough once reliant on social housing and dependent historically on manufacturing jobs (particularly at the Ford car plant) which have now severely declined, Barking and Dagenham has many similarities to northern towns which experienced disturbances in 2001. Within the borough, there is a marked difference between Barking, closer to inner London and capitalising on that proximity to some extent through developing retail, housing and transport links as part of the London Thames Gateway; and Dagenham, to the east and more firmly part of Essex, and suffering more markedly from a lack of alternative forms of employment. An important difference between the post-industrial experience of Barking and Dagenham and that of ex-manufacturing towns in northern England is that Barking and Dagenham's population continues to grow. Much of the new population is made up of ethnic minority families moving outwards from inner London boroughs, particularly to family-sized former social housing (Williams and Keith, 2006:3-4).

Proximity to the more established multiculturalism of inner London makes Barking and Dagenham a ready comparator to it, and a place against which national and local policy practitioners have tended to measure their relative success in managing ethnic diversity (e.g. Muir, 2008). Employment and housing pressures are usually described within this narrative as at the root of racialised tensions in the borough. Yet this materialist framing has a nostalgic tendency which celebrates an imagined past of

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<sup>17</sup> In the May 2010 local elections, all of the BNP councillors in Barking and Dagenham lost their seats.

certainties of employment, housing and nuclear family values; a past of 'British culture' without immigration (see the debates between Dench et al, 2006 and Farrar, 2008; and Blond and Pabst, 2007 and Keith, 2007b). In this, it can mirror the nostalgic racist tendencies attributed to the 'white working class' (elided with BNP voters) who have become associated with Barking and Dagenham. The nostalgia of these narratives provides an easy-to-follow storyline which also silences alternative materialist framings. Shortage of housing supply is taken as a given, as is the consequent competition for resources, whereas alternative models of house building, distribution, or ownership are not part of the debate – silencing any questioning of the models of power and resource distribution which *create* this competition.

Thus Barking and Dagenham can be made to represent the condition of post-colonial melancholia, in which Britain's white populations are stuck with an unrealised expectation of a promised white supremacy which has not materialised (Gilroy, 2004; Hewitt, 2005:131). Barking and Dagenham is thus the past which has only just met with the future, in the form of migration, and been found wanting. Such narratives can either mourn the past (as those populations are thought to), or construct 'the white working class' as necessarily backwards (and racist) because of their nostalgia (Bonnett, 2010:123). Either way, the narrative of 'white working class' populations, subject to economic and social deprivation as a result of wider global forces, and as a result turning to far right racism, is represented through references to Barking and Dagenham; and this narrative situates its population as in the 'past' of a multicultural, convivial cosmopolitan future. Imagining the place (or any place) as somewhere populated by some violent racists but *simultaneously* by those deserving of sympathy does not provide so easy a narrative; it necessitates uncomfortable positions (Keith and Pile, 1993:224).

## ***New arrivals: reimagining multicultural***

### *History*

A third narrative which intertwines with community cohesion debates is that of British identity, and its relationship to lived multicultural and prescribed multiculturalisms. The debate about national identity is of course ancient, but the narrative I will concentrate on here is one which persistently imagines British identity as white and somehow unchanging, in defence against a reality of changing and emergent forms of 'Britishness'. Such a nationalist narrative is not unique to Britain of course. Nor, indeed, are the 'values' which are often claimed as particularly British. Part of the work of nation-building is defining an imagined community in opposition to outsiders (Anderson, 1991), and re-imagining this shared community or solidarity is an ongoing process (Calhoun, 2007:166). The pastoral and agricultural have long been associated with an idealised nostalgia of Britain and Britishness (and more specifically, England and Englishness) and mobilised to promote this nationalism (Chakraborti and Garland, 2004:384; Keith, 2005:33; Neal, 2002:443; Stedman Jones, 1989:311; Williams, 1973:7). While notions of national culture (and public services) being 'swamped' by immigrants are often invoked in relation to Britain as a whole (Solomos, 2003:66), this becomes much more potent when used in relation to the countryside which remains imagined, and often lived, as an implicitly white place (Bonnett, 1993:182; Chakraborti, 2010:509; Garland and Chakraborti, 2006:160; Knowles, 2008) – where 'white' is imagined as also Anglo-Saxon, Protestant and heterosexual.

Attempts to reimagine Britishness as diverse and changing have been hampered by the necessity of confronting histories of nation-building which rest on racialised inequality and discrimination. A significant attempt at such re-imagining pre-dates the community cohesion narratives by just a year. The Runnymede Trust<sup>18</sup> established an independent Commission for the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain in 1998, a launch initially endorsed by the then Home Secretary Jack Straw. The Commission published its report in October 2000, recommending that a new form of inclusive British identity be developed, incorporating flux and heterogeneity. It suggested this would involve

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<sup>18</sup> A race equality think tank.

negotiating the 'systematic, largely unspoken racial connotations' of Britishness (Parekh, 2002:38). The ensuing media coverage took this as a slur on British identity, replacing 'racial' with 'racist'; and using this to suggest that the multiculturalist approach advocated by the Commission was one which would 'rewrite Britain's history' (quoted in McLaughlin and Neal, 2004:160). The response of the press was a nationalist and conservative version of multiculturalism, one which proclaimed a pride in Britain (and its professed tolerance and inclusiveness) before all else (Fortier, 2005:564).

This furore illustrates the difficulty of addressing issues of 'unspoken racial connotations' – when these connotations are unspoken precisely *because* they threaten underlying narratives of identity and location. The risk of examining these connotations is two-sided: both of being seen as straightforwardly reifying racial difference, and of being accused of reifying racism by pointing out its existence or potential. The apparent silencing of 'race' while still talking about it in coded terms was notable throughout previous attempts to engage with discrimination and with new forms of common identity, particularly through education (Gilroy, 1990:196; Gordon, 1990:184). The narrative of a countryside invaded by immigrants invokes unspoken connotations of both race and nation, and creates risks for those who would attempt to negotiate these silences openly. Likewise, 'the rural' has classed connotations. Picturesque rurality might include 'salt of the earth' farmers alongside landed gentry and city dwellers fleeing urban bustle, but rarely do these images reflect a consideration of rural poverty, homelessness, or exclusion (or the effects that rural isolation might have on making such struggles less visible).

### *Contemporary moments*

There have been several significant moments on which the narrative of arguments about the meaning of Britishness, Englishness and multiculturalism have turned during the 2000s. These include the arguments of 'progressive patriots' such as musician Billy Bragg that the St George's flag and English identity should be reclaimed by anti-racists;

suggestions by Gordon Brown when in government that a new bank holiday be created as a celebration of British identity; and the establishment under the Labour government of citizenship tests and citizenship ceremonies for new Britons. Even as – or perhaps because – the borders of national identity and freedom of movement shifted, the debate about what it means to be British (or English) intensified.<sup>19</sup>

That these debates are entangled in a confusion about what 'multiculturalism' means only intensifies these silences – and the discomforts that emerge when they are made to speak. Multiculturalism has been a popular target within community cohesion debates, blamed for encouraging separation (Cantle, 2005:10-1), though some formations of multiculturalism appear to share the emphasis on the need for a 'common core' of values that is at the centre of government-endorsed community cohesion definitions (Hickman 2007; Modood 2007). There are numerous summaries and taxonomies of the various understandings of *multiculturalism* and related terms, in both academic and policy-making arenas (see, for example, Hall, 2000; Morrell, 2008; Modood and Ahmad, 2007; Parekh, 2000). There are also many developed statements of position within the debate about what *multiculture* does or should mean (e.g. Modood, 2007; Kymlicka, 1995; Kundnani, 2002; Goodhart, 2004; Cantle, 2005). Unhelpfully, arguments centred on different philosophical models for understanding or living with difference or diversity, and the extent to which this is a desirable goal, are often confused with (much less frequent) considerations of 'actually existing multiculturalism' (Grillo, 2007:993). Stuart Hall points out these tangles of the debate and suggests that a useful starting point is to distinguish between 'multi-cultural' as a description of societies where different cultural communities live together; and 'multiculturalism' as a type of strategy adopted to manage such societies (Hall, 2000: 209).

The definitions of multiculturalism (as a philosophy, rather than as a lived reality) range from equal access to rights and services based on assimilation with majority customs;

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<sup>19</sup> Though under the coalition government there appears to have been a renewed focus on older models of nationhood drawing heavily on celebration of the royal family, with all the obvious connotations of class and race that that entails.

through cultural particularism in private coupled with universal public citizenship; to the allocation of group rights to different segments of society living alongside one another. Each of these rest on different beliefs about the relationships between solidarity and difference (Keith, 2005:53-4); the risk of either neglecting the particularities of individuals and groups by requiring too much similarity, or of emphasising difference to the extent that members of a society no longer see themselves as part of a shared whole. These arguments are not necessarily restricted to questions of migration, ethnicity, race or culture but can expand to other forms of difference such as gender, sexuality or disability and identity politics (Abraham, 2010:978; Cattle, 2005:159; Fraser, 2000).

Suggestions that multiculturalism has (or should have) ended (Kundnani, 2002; Goodhart, 2004; Phillips, 2005) are also entangled in the confusion about these differing meanings, and perhaps each attacks a different target. David Goodhart's intervention in the national press has been identified as a landmark controversy<sup>20</sup> (Khan, 2007:49; Alexander, 2007:116), asserting a need to turn back from recognition of difference to a more assimilationist stance, describing a British identity as an ethno-historical one, to be learnt, earned, or born into (Goodhart, 2004:para 13). Here, multiculturalism is attacked as a position 'which rejects a common culture', and thereby puts at risk the social solidarity required to maintain a welfare state, and basic social cohesion. This suggests that in Goodhart's view, ethnicity remains central to an idea of Britishness; that too much change to Britishness risks its disintegration; and therefore that those who do not fit the current state of Britishness (whatever that might be) should adapt to it, rather than vice versa; and that the numbers of 'different' people entering the country should be limited.

Goodhart comments that a changing population may provoke a changing relationship with history, suggesting that he fears this remaking of (national) narratives. There is no particular reason to think that the present's relationship to the past will ever be static, or indeed that it should. That the past and present are constantly used to make sense

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<sup>20</sup> And one he seemed to remain keen to repeat through the magazine he edited, see for example Mirza et al (2010).

of one another is a truism, and one invoked elsewhere as a resource for both multicultural and nationhood (e.g. Parekh, 2010).

Trevor Phillips (as newly appointed Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality) denounced Goodhart's views as 'genteel xenophobia', indicating that 'some liberals have given up on the idea of a multi-ethnic Britain' (Phillips, 2004:para 1). A year later, however, he was launching his own high-profile attack on multiculturalism (Phillips, 2005). This speech *did* seem to recognise multiple versions of the concept:

there has to be a balance struck between an 'anything goes' multiculturalism on the one hand, which leads to deeper division and inequality; and on the other, an intolerant, repressive uniformity (Phillips, 2005:para 38).

However, the message most widely taken from this speech was a warning that Britain was 'sleepwalking to segregation' (see e.g. Wetherell et al, 2007:47, 120), and that a model of multiculturalism which emphasised group difference was a cause of this. The prescription was instead to pursue the goal of integration, based on equality, participation and interaction. Conversely, Kundnani (2002) opposes multiculturalism as masking underlying power relations and discrimination – he welcomes its 'death' as providing an opportunity for a renewed left-wing critique.

The struggle to deal with these contradictions continues through community cohesion policy – as Claire Alexander puts it:

One of the biggest ironies of the 'community cohesion' agenda is that it creates the idea of minority ethnic communities at the same time as it demands their disappearance, and that it fixes ethnic identity within these community boundaries while demanding it move outside of them (Alexander, 2007:124-5).

The ambiguities of both cohesion and multiculturalism debates make it possible for community cohesion to be seen as both a 'retreat to multiculturalism' (Brighton, 2007:3) and an indictment of it (Alexander, 2007:116). The argument about where and



how boundaries of community should be drawn shifts between the local, national and global – while questions of whether boundaries should be drawn at all is seldom broached (though see Calhoun, 2002).

Debates about the meaning of nationhood have been tied to discourses about immigration throughout history, but narratives of migration to Britain which had for the second half of the twentieth century been linked to former colonies (Gilroy, 1987; Mercer, 1994:7) were challenged in the early twenty-first century by different patterns of movement (Vertovec, 2007:1025). Aside from the expansion of freedom of movement within the growing EU, the inequities of global labour flows on which society depends were brought into focus through national attention at moments such as the deaths of 21 Chinese migrant workers employed to collect cockles in Morecambe Bay in 2004 (Back, 2007b:32). This is notwithstanding the daily tragedies of those fleeing persecution or risking life and family to come to Britain, within or outside the official migration channels (see Back, 2007b:40-1). Migration is most often made visible through its demonisation, for example by association with 'foreign prisoners' who 'escape deportation after release' (The Independent, 2006). Changes to policy on those seeking political asylum in the UK meant that from 2000 applicants were dispersed to locations across the country to reduce concentration in areas of typical settlement, in turn creating new diversity in other areas (Home Office, 2005c:22). The biggest impact in terms of numbers of immigrants, however, was linked to the expansion of the EU to include ten new member states in 2004. These developments plotted quite different patterns of migration to those used to understand migration through British colonial histories (Bagguley and Hussain, 2003a; Vertovec, 2007), and brought migration to areas of Britain previously unused to the settlement of 'new arrivals' (COIC, 2007:31-3; Robinson and Reeve, 2007:19-20).

The timing of the Communities Secretary's establishment of a Commission on Integration and Cohesion appeared to coincide with increased concern about community cohesion linked to the terrorist attacks on London in July 2005. However, when the report of the Commission was released in 2007 it focused much less on those events than on the challenges and opportunities of new migration (COIC, 2007).

Providing a typology of five 'groups' with which local authority areas were encouraged to identify in order to consider their likely local cohesion challenges (p149-54), the report identified both changing and stable areas that are less affluent as being most likely to face cohesion challenges. The thrust of the whole report was reflected in its title, *Our Shared Future*, which emphasised that both new migrants and existing communities had responsibility for mutual respect and civility, as well as being entitled to a sense of trust in public institutions which demonstrate visible social justice. The name of the commission – using 'integration' as well as 'cohesion' – seemed to be an attempt to draw attention to the specific measures that might be needed to enable new migrants to *integrate* into Britain (requiring government efforts, not simply efforts of migrants themselves) alongside *cohesion* as a more long-term process involving all residents or citizens. Perhaps because of the connotations of the term 'integration', which suggest homogenising assimilation to some people, this term has not been frequently used in policy debates (Spencer, 2011).

Like the Commission for the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain before it, what the report became best known for was not what its authors necessarily intended as a central message (Keith, 2007a). The most headline-grabbing element of the COIC's report was the proposal to move away from funding third sector groups and services which operated purely on the basis of group identity:

funding to community groups should be rebalanced towards those that promote integration and cohesion, and... 'Single Group Funding' should be the exception rather than the rule for both Government and external funders (COIC, 2007:160).

This recommendation reflected older concerns that competitive structures for bidding for community grants could not only create bounded identity communities in order to present funding applications, but that the ensuing competition between ethnic groups could further reinforce divisiveness (Ouseley, 1990:141). But it became swept up within an 'end of multiculturalism' debate and interpreted as insistence on an assimilatory approach toward nationhood.

### *Place*

As I have argued, one narrative of nationhood in Britain relies on the countryside as an implicitly white symbol of history and identity. The image of this countryside being 'swamped' by immigrants is thus potent. Narratives of invasion were mobilised in response to the increasing presence of asylum seekers and refugees outside the main metropolitan conurbations (as a result of government dispersal policies) from 2000. The population of new asylum seekers was, however, tiny in comparison with the arrival of migrants from new EU member states between 2004 and 2006. While 427,000 migrants from the new EU accession states had registered under the UK Worker Registration Scheme by 2006 (Vertovec, 2007:1036), at its peak the asylum dispersal scheme had spread 54,000 migrants from London and the south-east of England to other areas of Britain (Vertovec, 2007:1042). Together, these new patterns of migration were a significant disruption to the narrative of an ever-stable rurality, as many migrants took up low-paid agricultural work in rural areas (Robinson and Reeve, 2006:6).

The narratives of areas previously relatively untouched by migration, now struggling with sudden diversity and increases in population size, are less directly tied to a specific place than the narratives associated with Oldham and with Barking and Dagenham which I described above. However, Peterborough *is* used repeatedly as an example of this narrative. Though a city, Peterborough sits at the centre of a subregion of market towns, and the local authority covers rural as well as urban areas. Aiming to compete as a growing city with a planned expansion of higher education and environmental enterprises, the city is attempting to project its image as a growing regional centre. The city itself has had established ethnic minority communities for decades, was a national reception centre for asylum seekers and attracted new EU migrants to work in agricultural and food processing industries. The pace of inward migration from international as well as national sources has increased greatly over recent years, with an expectation that there will be a 21% increase in the population aged 0 to 14 between 2008 and 2021, and a 57% increase in those aged over 65 (Greater

Peterborough Partnership, 2008:7-8). The local authority is thus not only seeking to improve the quality of life of existing residents, but to understand the changing needs of a population that is growing rapidly in size as well as diversity, and in the rural as well as urban areas.

Peterborough was a Community Cohesion Pathfinder authority, a programme intended to develop early lessons from community cohesion initiatives. Subsequently, the city's experience has been used as an example of good practice from which other localities can learn (e.g. COIC, 2007:96, 166; Home Office, 2005a; Home Office, 2005c:50). Positioned as a place which has overcome difficulties, Peterborough represents the narrative of new forms of migration reaching parts of the UK previously equated with tranquil whiteness. Having experienced early difficulties associated with the arrival of asylum seekers, the town can now present itself as having learnt how to overcome these challenges and establish new models of integration and multiculturalism, entering the present/future of mobile multiculturalism in a way to which others should aspire.

### ***Superdiversity: where old problems become new solutions?***

#### *History*

Throughout the previous narratives I have suggested that places with 'community cohesion problems' have been imagined as outside an idealised multicultural nation, and that these narratives allow those who use them to indulge in continued scaremongering about threats to national identity which are positioned at a safe distance. It may seem counter-intuitive to imagine the ideal of community cohesion within the inner city, given the histories of demonising this as a place of crime, violence and deviance. The change from seeing the inner city as a place of poverty, to a potential engine of growth, is relatively recent (Keith and Rogers, 1991:7-11). The flows of global capital which also require global labour flows have of course always passed

through cities, but now the presence of populations with recent origins across the world provide cultural capital to be consumed, as well being as a source of labour (Jacobs, 1996:99-100).

The move from demonisation to celebration was not without struggle. In the 1980s, for example, political mobilisations by ethnic communities subject to harassment, discrimination and violence coincided with a movement of left-wing radicals in the inner cities, largely in response to the punitive policies of the Thatcher governments (Lansley et al, 1989). Among the most potent struggles of this time was the attempt by many local authorities in inner London (as well as urban areas outside of London, significantly Manchester), to develop anti-racist and multicultural policies. This gave way to the narrative of 'loony left' councils and many, largely spurious, tales of the excesses of 'politically correct' policies, such as attempts to ban the singing of *Baa Baa Black Sheep* in schools (Gordon, 1990:179-80) because it was allegedly seen as 'racist'.

Early local policies designed to address racism within institutions received criticism not only from those opposed to their aims, but also from anti-racists and progressives who saw many of them as being counter-productive in practice. Race Awareness Training (RAT) became the epitome of this problem. Local authority officers who were regarded as racist would be sent on training at which they were encouraged to recognise their attitudes and overcome them. In practice, this was a punishment for those considered racist. But it also enabled them to become 'even more sophisticated at projecting themselves and covering up deficiencies and prejudices' (Ouseley, 1990:147). Meanwhile, RAT's focus on individual attitudes 'left the institution with all its power structures relatively untouched' (Ouseley, 1990:146). The reliance on 'guilt complexes' to regulate behaviour and 'the determinism of seeing all white people as inherently racist' provoked criticism of RAT from anti-racists as well as from the New Right (Solomos and Ball, 1990:218).

The 'loony left' characterisation belies the fact that many inner city local authorities had systematically discriminatory policies at this time. Housing in particular was a service in which severe discrimination on race grounds was found to exist in a number

of inner city authorities (Ben-Tovim et al, 1986; Jeffers and Hoggett, 1995; Lansley et al, 1989; Solomos and Singh, 1990). Hackney was one authority which became infamous, after action by the Commission for Racial Equality and pressure from local black communities engendered a review of housing allocations and management practices (CRE, 1984; Solomos and Singh, 1990:98). Indeed, this, like many other policy narratives I have highlighted (and see especially Chapter Six), was reincorporated by the local authority as an attempt to demonstrate good practice in *overcoming* institutional racism (Solomos and Singh, 1990:103). To some extent, the authority's eventual successes in improving practices and outcomes were recognised as such by others (Ouseley, 1990:151).

In the aftermath of these bruising struggles, there has been progress in addressing some of the more discriminatory policies and practices of local authorities and other agencies. Overt racism is no longer acceptable in most aspects of public life, but there remains a legacy of awkwardness about *how* to talk about discrimination and difference, and *what* precisely might be considered offensive or unjust. This leads to silences about these subjects and their histories, which can make negotiating this terrain both difficult and discomfiting.

The power of these associations and the way they were promoted in the national media are such that many councils, including Hackney, have found it hard to shake an image of radicalism/incompetence/corruption in the ensuing years (Ball et al 1990:86; Solomos, 1986:29). It has encouraged councillors to adopt policies intended to distance themselves from loony left labels, particularly by emphasising diversity and inclusion rather than the more overtly oppositional anti-racism (Ball et al, 1990:90; Gordon, 1990:176; for more on the shift from 'anti-racism' to 'diversity', see Ahmed, 2007b; Faist, 2009).

### *Contemporary moments*

The reinvention of the Labour Party as New Labour was partly about distancing itself

from the 'Old Left' label, from the idea that the party could not be trusted with the national economy, and from concerns such as racism and policing, which were 'seen as vote losers distracting public attention from Labour's "traditional" political heartland' (Keith and Murji, 1990:130). The shift towards neoliberalism, communitarianism and pragmatism all contributed to a massive increase in culture-based regeneration of inner cities. Reconceptualising diversity as a virtue has been part of reimagining it as a capitalist asset, and a governed and managed activity (Jacobs, 1996:87). In this process, the 'success story' is both 'neoliberal and multicultural', firmly in the present (if not the future) and 'aggressively forward-looking'. The 'brash multiculturalism of consumption' has a London focus, particularly in relation to its draw on competitive, young, highly skilled migrants; but this sheen is also to some extent lent to the rest of the United Kingdom (Bonnett, 2010:130), and treated as a model or laboratory for the future of multiculturalism (as in Butler and Hamnett, 2011:20). This narrative of forward-looking dynamic diversity centred in London (but enveloping the rest of the country) was central to London's successful bid for the 2012 Olympics (Vertovec 2007:1025; Wetherell, 2008:306-7).

One narrative of community cohesion, then, is that it is an attempt to roll out a post-racial settlement from London to the rest of the UK. The proclamation that chicken tikka masala was now 'Britain's national dish' by then Foreign Secretary Robin Cook (Cook, 2001) was based on an understanding that cultural mixing had become banal and ordinary, but it was also about promoting an image of Britain as slightly exoticised and no longer stodgily reliant on 'meat and two veg'. In 2006, David Miliband (as Cabinet Minister for Communities and Local Government), gave a speech to the Scarman Trust in which he stated that 'diversity is a fact across all societies. All countries are multicultural and there is no going back' (Miliband, 2006). In the context of an argument to 'meet the challenges of a multi-ethnic society' by 'strengthening community' this was a moderate progressive speech, and more strongly empirical than Cook's. These comments are particularly interesting however for their resonance with the often-quoted (but difficult to source)<sup>21</sup> mantra of New Labour that 'we're all middle

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<sup>21</sup> Though see, for example, Blue, 2008; Hatherley, 2011; Pickard, 2010; Webb, 2011; Woods, 2010 – and for commentary on this as a New Labour agenda, see Skeggs, 2004:54.

class now'. The assumption is that if 'we' are all middle class and multicultural, the struggles with poverty and racism are over. Persisting power inequalities are silenced, as are struggles over ideology in a post-political age (Mouffe, 2005:35; Swyngedouw, 2010:214).

The associated technocratic approach to multicultural and diversity is exemplified in the operationalisation of community cohesion policy within government. In 2007, new national indicators were introduced which local authorities across England and Wales could choose to incorporate in their Local Area Agreement with national government, as a way of measuring their impact on the local area. The set of indicators included three separate measures to monitor community cohesion. These were:

NI1: Percentage of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area

NI2: Percentage of people who feel that they belong to their neighbourhood

NI4: Percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality

(CLG, 2007c:5).

These measures are given similar status and expectations for improvement to (for example) measures of the efficiency of refuse collections or the quality of public play areas. Yet they continue to rely on the collection of large-scale survey data about subjective measures, whose causes are much harder to isolate or manage. They are a 'technology of community', a device to make community or the experience of community real, and thereby something on which it is possible to operate (Rose, 1999b:189; see Chapter One). The indicators were widely taken up by local authorities across the country, suggesting either that they were widely accepted as measuring local priorities or (more cynically) as easy-to-meet targets.

These relatively anodyne measurements of what it means to live well and safely within diverse communities emerged at the same time as diversity itself was increasing exponentially in its complexity (Keith, 2005:177-8). 'Super-diversity' has been coined as



a term to not only recognise the increasing number of locations across the globe from which migrants are now arriving in significant numbers in the UK, but also to emphasise that the word 'migrant' gives very little sense of the diversity of their experiences as it varies across different social positionings of class, gender, length of settlement, legal status, sexuality, family connections, and so on (Vertovec, 2007). Developments in extending non-discrimination law to a growing number of 'protected groups' through the Equality Act 2010 and the merging of existing equalities bodies into a single organisation is one of the few ways in which policy or legal instruments explicitly attempt to address cross-cutting elements of diversity and their relationship to power. New legal protection from discrimination, and recognition that discrimination, disadvantage and inequalities of power can come in many forms and operate with different dynamics have not been translated further into a discourse about commonalities of oppression, however (Gavrielides, 2011). It remains to be seen how the law will be interpreted and to what extent it will address specific inequalities, or mask them.<sup>22</sup> The Equalities and Human Rights Commission began work in 2009 on mapping experiences of groups who might be affected by several types of discrimination at once. The Act also includes a duty for public bodies to promote 'good relations'.<sup>23</sup> Yet there is a lack of connection made in policy debates and academic literatures between new equalities and good relations duties, and community cohesion policy.

### *Place*

As noted above, Hackney is associated with the narratives of the inner city not just because of its histories of migration and poverty (see e.g. Harrison, 1983), but also in relation to its histories of governance and engagement with racism and anti-racism. It is one of the local authorities whose names still act metonymically for the idea of the

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<sup>22</sup> This remains in question as the coalition government raised the question of whether the Equality Act 2010 should be 'scrapped altogether' as part of its 'Red Tape Challenge' consultation which seeks to 'reduce the overall burden of regulation' (see [www.redtapechallenge.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/equalities](http://www.redtapechallenge.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/equalities) [last accessed 8<sup>th</sup> June 2011]).

<sup>23</sup> Which builds on the terminology of previous Race Relations Acts and Local Government Acts.

'loony left'. It is also a place whose metonymic associations are strongly tied to the danger of the inner city (see, for example, Bonnett, 1993:171; Oakeshott, 2008; Sinclair, 2009:9). Yet these connotations are also, in part, what has attracted growing creative industries and artists to the area, which have in turn contributed to its wider desirability. The marketing of London as an Olympic city on the basis of its multicultural associations is matched by the re-marketing of its resonances of urban edginess, as in the pirating of Hackney Council's municipal logo by Nike, to sell sports clothing worldwide (LBH, 2006c; Tran, 2006; for more on how Hackney's diversity has been used as a source of meaning and brand see Chapter Five).

In the era of community cohesion policy, Hackney did not seem to fit any of the narratives of 'community cohesion problems' previously outlined. In part, this was because each of them has focused on challenges posed by new immigration (and reactions to it), or on the nature of 'parallel lives' defined by two separated communities. In this light, Hackney can be imagined as happily cohesive – in that the superdiversity of its residents might avoid large factional identity groups which could congeal into the rivalries of competitive identity politics. Ideas of multiculturalism could also, in some inflections, be broadened beyond migration and race to embrace other forms of diversity. In this formation, the 'folk devil' is less the migrant (or queer); instead it is the racist (or homophobe) who becomes the constitutive outside of the imagined national community. The past of far right activism in inner London, political in-fighting, and struggles against institutional discrimination are forgotten, or at least less visible (Watson and Wells, 2005; Wemyss, 2009:94). And multicultural is frozen as an achieved goal, a cohesive community, rather than an ongoing, lived process. The inner city, and in particular inner London (with its proximity to national politicians and press) becomes a repository of hope rather than despair, for instance as a symbolic figurehead for New Labour's attempts to tackle some of Britain's 'most deprived and crime-ridden estates' when Prime Minister Tony Blair launched his programme of inner city investment, the New Deal for Communities, on the Holly Street estate in 1998 (BBC News, 1998).

But this narrative of happily 'rubbing along' does not necessarily take account of power

inequalities. Hackney, or the inner city, could come to symbolise the inequities of neoliberal forms of multiculturalism which allow 'difference' to be cultural capital for some, but to remain the source of exclusion for others (Ahmed, 2000:125; Bell and Binnie, 2000:86). In celebrating local diversity, it can become too easy to forget not only local histories of violent racism (Keith, 1993) but also the internal tensions, dynamics and injuries that a happy multicultural sheen might hide. These wrangles over the symbolism and processes of silencing and branding in Hackney's histories are discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

### ***Conclusions***

In this chapter I have outlined four narratives of community cohesion which are actively used and re-interpreted in both policy and academic worlds. I have suggested that these narratives are connected and feed off one another, and that each of them are simplified versions of more nuanced and contradictory events and interpretations. The chapter has also introduced the key events in policy and beyond it which inform some of these narratives, and the context in which community cohesion policy has been developed and negotiated over a decade. I have tried to suggest that, when looked at through a variety of lenses, connections can be made which suggest both continuities and dislocations from policy interventions in previous decades. In the rest of the thesis, I engage directly with the narratives of policy negotiation provided by practitioners in the course of my research. This chapter should provide both a factual background to the events and interventions to which they allude, and a guide to some of the ways these moments have been and can be fitted together to make sense of policy worlds, or deconstructed to examine their silences and assumptions.

As I have shown, understanding community cohesion policy as bound to particular events, times and places conjures a set of easily digestible stories which can be readily referred to in conversation and negotiations (riots in Oldham in 2001; election of the BNP in Barking and Dagenham in 2006; new migration into Peterborough throughout

the 2000s; long-standing diversity in Hackney). As, throughout the thesis, I provide further evidence of how policy practitioners imagine and use such narratives in their negotiations, I will suggest that in doing so they employ a form of sociological imagination that makes links between local, personal experiences and societal structures of power distribution. Within these narratives there is much to be learned from observing what is silenced, as well as what is spoken. The lack of discussion of class inequality in these narratives (except with respect to the racially marked and analytically confused category of 'white working class') is the most obvious silence.

In Chapters Five and (especially) Six, I will explore what the narratives outlined here mean for policy practitioners when working within a place that has been branded with such easily regurgitated narratives. The meanings attached to a place might be based on empirical events, but these meanings also help to determine future events and policies. Much energy can be spent on trying to produce *alternative* narratives and associations. As I will demonstrate further throughout the thesis, many policy practitioners I spoke to recognised the power of these narratives and used them to illustrate their understandings of community cohesion policy. But many also described how they attempted to disrupt or reinterpret the associations that their locality had within the community cohesion policy narrative. Chapter Four, which now follows, explores an instance of these negotiations in practice, in Hackney.

## **Chapter Four: 'Is there anything the council did that distracted you from extremism?'**

### ***Introduction***

This chapter discusses how policy practitioners negotiated difficult subjects around the establishment of the Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) fund. That is, this chapter looks at how a policy problem is constructed and negotiated within a local authority, in response to and in negotiation with national policies, local circumstances and individual understandings. It raises questions about the role and purpose of local government and its relation to power, agency and control. The focus on PVE draws attention to how far community cohesion policy, in one articulation, has been tied to the targeting of Muslims as a 'problem group', and refracted through the lens of religious and ethnic representation, privilege and stigma. As discussed in Chapter Three, some constructions of community cohesion position it as separate from PVE. This separation does not necessarily translate into the common-sense understandings of practitioners. In my experiences and interviews with local and national policy practitioners they suggest, based on the timing, presentation, implementation and funding of projects and their own professional and personal experience, that there are more complicated agendas at play than those laid out openly in official documentation. This chimes with much sociological comment on the subject (e.g. Husband and Alam, 2011; McGhee, 2008). Yet the articulation of what community cohesion policy or PVE policy is 'really about' varies with circumstance as well as time and place – that is, in negotiations between local and central government, power relations determine what can be said, and how. Through this chapter, it becomes clear that different levels of reality, information and argument become important at different levels and in different parts of governing organisations. These shifting terms of debate determine the most effective (or possible) forms for local policy practitioners to negotiate difficult subjects.

I explore these themes through a consideration of how the Preventing Violent Extremism Fund (PVE) was introduced as a national programme, drawing on documentary sources and ethnographic data from my experience of working as a local

government officer in Hackney at the time. The data here includes my own personal account of dealing with the fund as a local policy practitioner, and the reflections of colleagues in interviews. These were of course situated experiences, and the data I use consists of narratives reconstructed retrospectively. As such I do not claim to reflect the experiences of practitioners elsewhere in the country (although I do discuss some evidence of parallels). Instead, by first presenting these narratives and then considering the work that each of them (including my own) is doing in positioning the speaker in relation to governing, I reflect on what it means to practice policy, to be at once part of an organisation with its own rules and to have one's own agency. I consider ways in which practitioners negotiate uncomfortable positions that might arise in this process when they give an account of themselves.

The chapter opens with a descriptive account of the negotiations over the establishment of the PVE programme in Hackney. This account offers a perspective which differentiates between central and local government, and between different parts of the local state (especially the local authority and the police), in terms of understandings, goals, and ways of working. It also suggests that within those organisations there are varying perspectives.

In subsequent parts of the chapter I consider how practitioners in local and national government, and in the different cultures of local government and the police, hold different understandings and prioritisations of information, measurement, impacts and presentation of policy. As well as taking seriously practitioners' accounts of what happened (including my own account), I analyse the ways practitioners present *themselves* within these narratives, and what this can tell us about policy practice and the negotiation of power and personal commitments that entails.

### ***Preventing Violent Extremism lands on my desk***

In early February 2007, the Chief Executive of the London Borough of Hackney received

a request to attend a meeting of London local authority Chief Executives, called by the Government Office for London (GOL), to discuss the Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) Pathfinder Fund. At that time, I was working as a policy adviser in Hackney, responsible for maintaining awareness of policy, political and community developments, forming strategic alliances within and outside the local authority, advocating policy responses and ensuring the implementation of strategy agreed by the political and managerial leadership. Because I had a broad remit for 'inclusion' issues, I was asked to prepare a one-page briefing on the background to the PVE fund, its significance for Hackney, and a recommended response. The Fund was new, and the guidance note stated that Government Offices had been working with local authorities since the previous October to develop programmes. Having checked with colleagues in the community safety team that we had not been involved in those discussions, I suggested in the briefing that it seemed 'unlikely they expect us to take part'.

Nevertheless, I advised on the headlines of the funding programme: it was intended to 'encourage local approaches to preventing violent extremism'; 'this is to be separate from community cohesion activity'; and £2million of the £5million one-year fund would be 'available for bids from London boroughs with more than 5% Muslim population – this includes Hackney'. I also pointed out in the briefing that Hackney's 'large Muslim population (14% - compared to 8% in London)' was 'ethnically diverse, including Turkish and Somali communities' while 'only 1% of Hackney's population is Pakistani (2% in London), 3% Bangladeshi (2% in London) – the ethnic groups of Muslims the government appears to be most concerned about'; and stated that 'we have not noted any problems related to Islamic extremism in the borough' despite proximity to Finsbury Park Mosque (in Haringey) which had been associated with extremists. Finally, I suggested that:

It seems unlikely that we would be involved at this stage as we do not have a history of problems with extremism and we would not want to highlight a particular community or group of communities as 'a problem'.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Internal document; as discussed in Chapter Two, I gained access to many documents discussed in this chapter as a result of my participant-observer status, and therefore will not give full referencing

I advised that we should attend the meeting to stay updated and see whether funds could be incorporated into existing community engagement programmes. I suggested we use the opportunity to highlight diversity within Muslim communities and to ask about the relevance of the fund to extremism beyond that claiming connections to Islam.

The Chief Executive sent an Assistant Director to the meeting as her representative, as did many of her peers.<sup>25</sup> After the meeting, I was briefed that it had been an uncomfortable affair. Representatives of the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) and Government Office for London (GOL) were not pleased with the level of seniority of attendance from local authorities; and local authority representatives expressed a number of concerns about the scheme (this account is also supported by documentary sources including Kelcher (2007) and House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee (2010:226)).

One concern local authorities expressed was very practical: the extremely short amount of time in which we were expected to produce bids that fitted the PVE priorities. Guidance for the fund was published on 7<sup>th</sup> February; the meeting with GOL was on 13<sup>th</sup> February; and expressions of interest were due by noon on 2<sup>nd</sup> March. Though local government bureaucracy is often criticised for the time it takes to reach agreement and take action, this tempo does not simply stem from a disinclination to progress. Rather, the typical bureaucratic requirements for due process and consideration of financial, legal, political and managerial implications exist to ensure fairness and avoid corruption or mistakes. The importance given to these checks and balances limits flexibility, but may be particularly pronounced in those authorities that still suffer from a reputation of incompetence or corruption from past decades (see Chapter Three).

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details for them in the bibliography.

<sup>25</sup> 26 of the 33 local authorities in London were eligible to bid for PVE on the basis of the size of their Muslim populations. A total of 52 local authorities were eligible nationally (see Kelcher, 2007).



Nor can these practical considerations be separated entirely from the more politically sensitive issues which concerned local authorities (including Hackney) about the way PVE had been constructed. The framing of the fund as exclusively targeted at extremism in the name of Islam without reference to other forms of violent extremism, the focus on Muslim populations only, and the lack of any apparent basis for selecting eligible authorities aside from the proportion of their population that was Muslim, were raised not just in my briefing, but also by colleagues from other authorities. These were presented as not just problematic bases for the policy in themselves, but also likely to be counter-productive in that they might undermine relationships with local community groups (Muslim and non-Muslim), as a result of how the programme was being presented, and the way that funds were to be distributed. Thus these were not just questions of language but of implementation and process, which local authority officers suggested would be difficult to address, especially in the short time available.

However, it was made clear by civil servants from GOL and CLG at the February meeting and in subsequent correspondence that all 'eligible' authorities were expected to submit proposals to the fund, and that non-participation would be seen as a sign of not taking seriously the threat of future terrorist action (see also McLean, 2008). It was hard for any local authority to refuse additional investment in services. In Hackney, being one of Britain's poorest areas made such a bold and apparently uncooperative move even harder, as did its still haunting history of municipal failures (see Chapters Three and Five).

Though their concerns about the fund had not been addressed, the senior management and politicians in Hackney decided to submit an 'expression of interest' without necessarily committing to the programme. After all, this was still being described by CLG and GOL as a bidding process in which we may or may not be 'successful'. This decision was made after contact with peers in other local authorities, and indeed most authorities did present initial expressions of interest. In Hackney, officers in community safety, youth services and community engagement were asked to develop a proposal. At this point I had a coordinating role, acting as a contact point for politicians and senior management.

In the course of this process, I was contacted by a representative from a local Muslim community organisation. She had been in contact with the youth service about delivering a programme of activities for Muslim young people, and she was concerned to hear that the local authority was only lukewarm about whether it would pursue the PVE programme that could potentially fund it. I tried to explain the concerns about the programme, that these were largely motivated by a feeling within the local authority that the design of the programme would stigmatise, and be resented by, Muslims. She told me she did not see things this way at all; and that on the contrary, if the funding opportunity were rejected, it would constitute neglect on behalf of the local authority of the needs of Muslim residents (needs she had identified, not necessarily the goals of PVE).

After our conversation, she forwarded me a proposal her organisation had written the previous October, to address problems they had identified with risky behaviour among some local Muslim young people, including drug-taking and drug-dealing, an increase in involvement in violent crime, and 'misguided influence on young Muslims regarding Islamic teachings' leading in some cases to 'isolation from the main Muslim community due to zealous behaviour not in accordance to teachings of traditional Islamic practice'. They proposed to address these issues by researching involvement in drugs with a view to developing peer support among Muslim young people; through self-managed youth activity including sports and skill development; and by establishing a committee of local Islamic scholars to provide better access to their teachings for young people.<sup>26</sup> This seemed like the kind of project we might have been looking for: an already identified need which fitted reasonably well with the aims of the national funding scheme. But there did not seem to be an awareness of the proposal among those local authority officers dealing with the PVE bid. The proposal had been addressed to councillors but it was unclear whether they or officers had either received it or responded, and if so, what the response had been.

I was concerned about how these developments were being perceived. It seemed to

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<sup>26</sup> Internal document.

me that as an organisation, we needed to be clear about what projects we might put forward for funding, and why we would support some and not others. In particular, when acting as a spokesperson for the authority, I wanted to know as much as I could about what decisions had been made (or not made) and why. It seemed to me that there could be a number of perfectly valid reasons why the months-old proposal I had been sent had not been taken forward, but I needed to be able to know what had happened in order to maintain an amicable relationship with the external organisation in question. So I followed up the query with colleagues who were developing the PVE bid, specifically in the youth service. Though I didn't find out whether the document had reached anyone in October (before we had heard of the PVE fund), it seemed that colleagues were in discussions with someone else in the organisation about the possibility of a joint bid. Much as the local authority was a variegated structure where contact with one officer may not equate to wider awareness, the community organisation was also made up of several people who may not all have been in constant communication.

Eventually, an expression of interest was developed with a different local organisation, for a project to 'undertake research with Muslim communities to identify experience and perceptions of Islamophobia' with subsequent work 'exploring the reasons for conflict and alternatives to conflict'.<sup>27</sup> Two weeks after this was submitted, the local authority Chief Executive received a letter from GOL saying that the borough would be 'offered' £90,000 to support that project. Despite the initial reticence of London boroughs reported in February, the letter stated that there had been high demand for funds; the £90,000 allocated to Hackney was thus 'not subject to further negotiation'. The first payment, the letter said, was to be made through the Local Area Agreement (LAA)<sup>28</sup> grant in April 2007 (two weeks from the date of the letter), and the programme

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<sup>27</sup> Internal document.

<sup>28</sup> Local Area Agreements (LAAs) were introduced in 2004/5. An LAA is an agreement between a local area and central government, including a set of improvement targets which local partners commit to achieving, and the funding allocations from central government that will underpin them. While the local LAA signatory is the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) which consists of major statutory sector and other organisations in a local area, the local authority is the accountable body. The coalition government announced in 2010 that they would abolish LAAs.

was to be formally launched by the Secretary of State following an event at the end of March.<sup>29</sup>

The local authority was thus instructed that it would be 'offered' funding for a specific project, which it had 'expressed interest' in providing. Officers and elected members in Hackney had (perhaps naïvely) understood these tentative terms at face value, assuming that an expression of interest would be submitted in order to preserve our options, but only as a literal initial expression of interest, a way of deferring a decision about whether or not to eventually participate. But the expression of interest was taken by central government to be a firm commitment to develop a local programme, to which many senior local practitioners still felt ambivalent (if not hostile).

The local political leadership repeatedly stated that they did not want to take the money if it would oblige them to run a programme ostensibly targeting Muslims – all local Muslims, Muslims in particular, and Muslims only – as potential terrorists. Yet there was clear pressure from CLG to show that the local authority was 'taking seriously' the potential threat of extremism. This was coupled with local pressure from Muslim organisations who saw PVE as a potential funding stream to develop their work. The senior management team and Cabinet developed an alternative local solution to this impasse. It was the end of the financial year and an underspend had been identified within the voluntary sector grants budget. Cabinet agreed that this would be used to develop an alternative fund to the PVE programme in Hackney. They asked me to write a scoping document setting out its terms.

The proposed fund was 'to support vcs [voluntary and community sector] projects aimed at improving community cohesion... in a Hackney-focused way, sensitive to our local population'. It was intended to prepare the borough to bid for future funding 'from other sources, including the Preventing Violent Extremism fund where appropriate' by developing 'a strong base of projects demonstrating success'. We proposed to support projects addressing known areas of tensions between groups (socio-economic divisions and regeneration; intergenerational issues; high levels of

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<sup>29</sup> Internal document.

mobility and hidden communities; gang violence and area-based rivalries; links between 'single community' infrastructures) and 'identifying new or unacknowledged sources of conflict'.<sup>30</sup> The underlying issue was that the local authority had no evidence of emerging extremism in the borough, but officers and politicians *were* concerned about sources of tension or potential tension. The administrators of the Local Strategic Partnership advised their central government contacts of this, and that the local authority had therefore chosen not to accept the offer of PVE funding for 2007/8.

While it felt exceptional to refuse a funding stream from central government, I also felt, as an officer, quite proud of the compromise we had developed. Local politicians had taken a decision which they believed reflected the needs and wishes of local residents, and as officers we had found a way to deliver that. Between us we had done this in a way which did not reject outright the national policy, but questioned some of its premises and suggested constructive ways in which a local approach might differ. In theory, this also fitted with national agendas on localism, where authorities use their local knowledge to develop site-appropriate services. This didn't address, of course, what expectations might have been raised with organisations involved in the expression of interest for the PVE fund; but there remained the opportunity for them to be part of the alternative community cohesion fund.

However, this compromise did not satisfy those managing the PVE fund nationally and regionally. In fact it did not appear to register with them at all. This became clear when the local authority received an email informing us of new indicators which would be included in our Local Area Agreement (LAA) to measure the delivery of PVE. The initial proposal for these indicators read directly off the aims of the scheme that were given in national guidance, and suggested that local authorities measure the impact of their activities by reporting publicly on the number of Muslims who had been diverted from extremist beliefs, among other things.<sup>31</sup> On receiving an email communicating this, I

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<sup>30</sup> Internal document.

<sup>31</sup> This version of the indicators was not made public, and I no longer have a copy of the document. Measurement of the scheme's success was subsequently dramatically altered – see later in this chapter.

immediately went to talk to colleagues who were in regular contact with GOL about the LAA, sure that there must have been some misunderstanding. There were three immediate problems: we had not agreed to participate in PVE, yet were still being included in its measurement; the indicators were being inserted into the LAA without discussion; and the indicators themselves appeared impractical and offensive. As Emma, a senior officer in Hackney who I interviewed later, put it:

Emma: I don't know if they ever came up with a... definition for that indicator about cohesion, and I think when it first came out I was thinking well what are you gonna do, you just going to go out and knock on... people's door and go, ooh are you a Muslim, is there anything the council did that distracted you from extremism?

Although Emma does not distinguish cohesion and extremism, which have different indicators on which local government performance is measured, her point is a general one. Though Emma's comment is humorous, her suggestion does seem like a logical way to find out whether a project has helped 'Muslims in our communities' to 'reject violent extremist ideology and actively condemn violent extremism'. But it is also absurd in that the question, much like the original design of the PVE programme, makes an implicit assumption that Muslims need to be dissuaded from extremism, and the question does not seem like one that a person who either remained an extremist or had never been one would be likely to answer happily. This is a central example of how the language and premises of the PVE programme expose fundamental differences in conceptualisation of communities, measurement, information and the role of government within and between policy practitioners, local and national – which I consider further later in this chapter.

It was quite clear to me that the Mayor and Cabinet would have a problem with including these proposed measurements in local plans for the borough, and this turned out to be the case. This made little difference, however. GOL asked local performance managers for Hackney's figures on performance against NI35 (the PVE performance indicator). When they explained that Hackney had chosen not to participate in the

scheme, officials at GOL replied that the money had been passed onto the borough as part of the LAA block grant; which it had, despite the local authority's protestations. The introduction of LAAs as a contract between local authorities and central government had been promoted as a way of devolving power to local areas, reducing the number of targets and separate funding streams for which they are accountable to central government, with one contact point through the regional government office (CLG, 2007a). Yet NI35 was inserted into the 198 measures on which all LAAs across the country must report, after local negotiations for that year were completed. The only remaining element of choice for local authorities as to how to report was whether to make NI35 one of the 35 headline indicators, for which improved outcomes in their local area would result in additional 'reward' funding from central government.

This precise question – whether to include PVE as one of the most important measures of success in Hackney – arose a year later when renewing the LAA. At this point, the Borough Commander of Police presented a briefing for Hackney's Local Strategic Partnership steering group arguing that NI35 should be included in local reward indicators because Hackney was a high risk area for violent extremist activity.<sup>32</sup> The police briefing poses the question 'why does Hackney need to build resilience to violent extremism?' and in response quotes 2001 Census data on the size of the black and minority ethnic (BME) population in general. This appears to equate Muslims in general with the risk of violent extremism without any explanation, and to equate Muslims with BME populations in general, and BME populations with violent extremism. Though the report goes on to observe that 'Muslims are not a homogeneous group', it then states that 'Many Muslims may categorise themselves as having an Asian ethnicity, but this is not the case for all Muslims. Even within the category of Asian, there are huge cultural differences between Muslims from Pakistan, Africa and the Far East' [sic].<sup>33</sup> This suggests a lack of 'intelligence' within the police service not just about community relations and local threats, but also confusion about ethnic, 'racial', national and religious categories as well as basic questions of geography. The potential implications of such a lack of knowledge or understanding for

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<sup>32</sup> Internal document.

<sup>33</sup> Internal document.

relationships with and between local communities and identity groups will be discussed further below. I will also discuss what this approach to populations and data suggests about the perspectives and priorities within the police force.

What is particularly interesting about the police briefing is that it follows the national line pushed by both CLG and Home Office guidance on PVE that refers to past crimes, the size of the resident Muslim population, and nebulous 'intelligence' which cannot be revealed, as evidence of threats of future violence. It then suggests that this should be prevented by actions to be carried out by the local authority at the behest of the police, security services and central government. The overall argument of the report was that local intelligence pointed to a terrorist threat in Hackney which should be tackled through PVE schemes *led by the local authority*, thereby turning the 'softer' tools of persuasion and self-government directly into the service of agencies of disciplinary control.

These aspects of the relationship between local government and the police to some extent mirror the relationship between CLG and the Home Office on the national level. Within national government, it appeared that any debate about the balance between promoting good community relations and gathering intelligence on criminal terror-related activity had been won by the security services and the Home Office. Though PVE was administered by CLG through local government, it emerged from the national cross-government counter-terrorism strategy, known as CONTEST. This was published in 2006, and revised in 2009 (HM Government, 2009a). CONTEST consists of four strands – Prevent, Pursue, Protect and Prepare. At the time the PVE programme was launched, the stated aims of the Prevent strand were threefold: to tackle disadvantage, inequalities and discrimination that could 'contribute to radicalisation' (HM Government, 2006:1); to deter facilitation of terrorism by 'changing the environment in which the extremists and those radicalising others can operate' (p12); and challenging ideologies which are used to justify violence 'primarily by helping Muslims who wish to dispute these ideas to do so' (p2).

The PVE programme was the community-based part of the Prevent workstream,



implemented through local government, alongside policing and counter-terrorism work led by the police (HM Government, 2009a:14-15). Though the overall counter-terrorism strategy draws attention to 'structural problems... that may contribute to radicalisation' there are no specific efforts to address inequality or discrimination in the UK as part of the Prevent strategy. The PVE guidance even states explicitly that tackling disadvantage is to be considered elsewhere and that PVE work is not to be directed to this end (DCLG, 2008:11). The original PVE guidance stated its aims:

to develop a community in which Muslims in our communities:

- identify themselves as a welcome part of a wider British society and are accepted as such by the wider community;
- reject violent extremist ideology and actively condemn violent extremism;
- isolate violent extremist activity, and support and co-operate with the police and security services; and,
- develop their own capacity to deal with problems where they arise and support diversionary activity for those at risk (CLG, 2007b:3).

This guidance, published, promoted and managed by CLG, directly translates an 'intelligence', criminalising and securitising discourse into the official policy of local government.

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I have outlined my own experience of negotiating the Preventing Violent Extremism fund, and of attempting to do this in a way that met national requirements, local political priorities and alliances, and the practicalities of working in complex organisations and partnerships. While my account may read somewhat impersonally as a whole, there are moments where my personal investment in these negotiations becomes particularly clear. One example is where I describe a wish to ensure that proper processes of communication and decision-making have taken place in order to present a professional response to community organisations making inquiries about

the fund. Another is when I describe feeling 'proud' of the attempt at compromise which the local authority presented as a way of negotiating more difficult aspects of the project.

In the following parts of the chapter, I consider these moments and my reactions to them more analytically. I also draw on evidence from narratives of colleagues in Hackney and elsewhere, gathered in interviews some time later. I have organised the rest of the chapter around four elements of the 'difficult subjects' which appeared as most salient in the problems local government practitioners expressed with the PVE fund, and which have already begun to emerge in the narrative above. These were the relationship between local government and the police or the perceived 'securitisation' of local public services via PVE; the different understandings of measuring policy impacts held by different parts of government; the likely impact on local relationships between community organisations and the local authority; and the presentation and communication of the fund. The chapter examines what the narratives I have collected tell us about crisis points in the negotiation of policy related to cohesion, belonging, identity and inequality, and the means available for individual practitioners embedded within organisations to deal with them.

### ***'Intelligence'***

Brian: And the police, because of their pragmatic approach, get there faster than the local authority. Hence the Prevent... We're aware this needs to be done, it needs to be done, and therefore we will drive it through. Because it needs to be done. We know it's gonna come, and I think the council know it needs to be done. But where they'd like to have a few more meetings and discuss it a bit further and go – and convince [pause] you don't always get that time, so.

I had asked Brian, a senior local police officer involved in community cohesion work in

Hackney, about the inclusion of the PVE indicator in the Local Area Agreement, as I knew the police had pushed for this to be one of the 'reward indicators' for Hackney.<sup>34</sup> Brian's first response was to tell me that Hackney 'hits all the boxes that [this is] where is your next radicalised extremist [is] gonna come from' because it has 'huge levels of deprivation' and when people who have been in prison for extremism-related offences are released 'they all seem to come to Hackney'. He saw the reasoning as quite straightforward 'it needs to be done, and therefore we will drive it through'. Brian's view is that the local authority is simply dragging its feet, and will eventually cede to the inevitability of the police's more quickly-adopted approach.

While Brian frames the police's speed of adopting the PVE scheme as 'pragmatic', many of the objections to the scheme that I heard from local authority officials (and which I put forward myself when working as one) could also be framed that way. These objections were that the scheme simply would not address the problem it set out to solve, that even if extremism in the name of Islam was seen as an imminent threat, the focus on Muslims in general did not follow. While the parameters of their pragmatism differed, both local authority and police practitioners talked in terms of effectiveness, and of techniques that they saw as the most efficient to achieve desired outcomes.

In Chapter One, I described the importance of governmentality, the promotion of self-governing behaviours, to the development of community cohesion policy. A simplifying theoretical framework might suggest that local government has promoted self-government, while the police focus on disciplinary government. Until well into the 1980s, local government and the police in England operated as quite separate entities, particularly in London. While some local authorities had police committees, in London the first such relationship was established by the Greater London Council in the 1980s, where the police had previously reported only to the Home Secretary (Lansley et al, 1989:68). From that period, work between local authorities and the police developed, albeit often in a situation of mutual distrust or misunderstanding (Lansley et al, 1989:51). Pushes towards *partnership* across government agencies, especially in the

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<sup>34</sup> While the local authority is the lead organisation for the LAA, Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), a partnership of key statutory bodies including the police, health and local authority as well as the voluntary and private sectors, sign off the LAA.

2000s, have brought developments in working relationships which mean that local authority Chief Executives and their local police commanding officers sit together on Local Strategic Partnerships, and the two agencies are held jointly responsible by central government for community safety targets (though more recent proposals for directly elected police commissioners may alter this relationship again). Though there is consequent blurring at the edges with exchanges of responsibilities, staffing and resources, the two remain quite distinct institutions with distinct purposes and cultures. These distinctions become clearer when a controversy or crisis, such as the instigation of PVE, occurs. I suggest that the police and security services (and largely the national government policy guidelines) present their viewpoint as 'pragmatic' and 'no-nonsense' as it aims to root out terrorists without worrying about causing offence. Conversely, the local government perspectives I consider position themselves as pragmatic, in that to achieve their goals of building trust with local residents they cannot be seen to form part of the police and security services' intelligence apparatus.

An increasing focus on counter-terrorism work with Muslim communities followed bombings in London on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005.<sup>35</sup> National government established a number of working groups involving individual Muslims invited as private citizens, intended to find 'concrete proposals about how Muslim communities and the Government can further work in partnership to prevent extremism, and to reduce disaffection and radicalisation within Muslim communities across Britain' (Preventing Extremism Together Working Groups, 2005:97). This community relations focus did to some extent influence the PVE guidelines. The working groups proposed actions for engaging with Muslim women and young people, and support for community development and leadership, which appear as PVE priorities. But the working groups' ambition to promote understanding and dialogue about Muslim lives and religion – not just between Muslims but across society – were not developed further within PVE guidance (Preventing Extremism Together Working Groups, 2005; CLG, 2007b). There are also elements of the PVE priorities which do not relate directly to any recommendations of the working groups, around resilience and early intervention with communities (see also Bright, 2006:12). This

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<sup>35</sup> Though government thinking in this area had already begun by 2004 (see FCO, 2004; Thomas, 2010:443).

demonstrates a move from treatment of Muslim communities as potentially vulnerable in the working groups, to a treatment of 'Muslims in our communities' primarily as a potential threat within PVE; that is, from a 'community relations' focus to a 'security' focus.

This contrast can also be seen between the briefing which I produced as a local government policy practitioner responding to the PVE programme for Hackney, and that produced by the local police a year later (described earlier in this chapter). The most pressing argument of the police briefing was the risk of terrorist activity occurring in the borough, illustrated with information on previous arrests. The briefing also provided population data as a way of illustrating potential for violent extremism. But the way they used the data on ethnic and religious identity in the borough betrayed a lack of understanding of the information quoted. They confused ethnic, religious, national and 'racial' categories. The briefing stated the size of local Muslim (and ethnic minority in general) populations but the author did not apparently feel any need to provide further explanation of why this was considered a risk factor.

This approach was not limited to the police, however. The simple assumption of the national PVE guidance seemed to be that 'the main terrorist threat facing the UK currently comes from Islamist extremists' (CLG, 2007b); that 'Islamist extremists' formed a subset within the larger population group 'Muslim'; that therefore reaching more Muslims would result in reaching more extremists as a percentage of that group; and that the most efficient way to reach more Muslims would be to work in areas where the most Muslims live. In short, the assumption seemed to be that Muslims are a single group, and a set percentage of Muslims could be expected to be extremists or terrorists, distributed evenly across the population. There was no consideration of whether, for example, extremism might thrive outside of the larger concentrations of Muslim populations, rather than simply where the biggest numbers live (see Finney and Simpson 2009:109). This amounts to a question of how measurement is conceptualised at different levels and in different branches of government.

Conversely, a neglect of understanding the security intelligence on actual criminal

activity could be attributed to my briefing, where I dismissed the suggestion that there was evidence of terrorist activity in the borough. Indeed, the local authority did not have any information to suggest this, but there may have been information available. For instance, the police briefing provides information on three individuals who had been convicted of terrorist offences, with residences or family connections in Hackney. The contrast between these two briefings is not just in the arguments each made, but in the types of knowledge that are available and valued in the two cultures of the local authority and of the police, and what information each frames as essential (or unnecessary) to make sense of the situation (Trouillot, 1995:51).

When the two organisations work together, they each ask the other to take seriously their own form of knowledge and understanding of priorities – yet each retain their own over-riding concerns. To caricature this difference: police officers appear to see as self-evident that the most important ambition is finding and arresting (potential) bombers. Conversely, for local government officers, persuasion, trust and relationship-building seems the self-evident priority. Like the slippages that occur when discussing meanings of 'community cohesion' (between thinking of it as a state of affairs, a problem to be solved, a cause of problems or a possible solution), the emphasis on community relationships which local government practitioners made slip between connected, but different, relationships to the problem of extremism or terrorism. For the police, similar slippages occurred when talking about the quality of 'intelligence'. It is also worth noting that, to some extent, techniques of persuasion and relationship-building are perhaps the only ones *available* to local government in this context; while the police's more coercive powers were also limited by what information they had.

The lack of clarity about what 'intelligence' was available was important in blurring the roles between local government and the police or security services. This nebulous concept was used both as an existing resource that justified the form and development of PVE, and as an output of PVE. Local authorities and individual service providers were expected to develop knowledge of local communities not just in terms of needs, priorities or tensions, but as information on risks which could be passed on to the security services. It is understandable that information on significant criminal

investigations may not be made widely available. However, there was a feeling among local government practitioners in Hackney that those with access to this information (largely the police locally) were using this knowledge to exert pressure on those without access. These fears were not confined to Hackney; for example, the Leader of Bradford Council appeared on *Newsnight* in September 2008, stating:

What they said was, that if we were willing to go out and monitor the Muslim community and use the resources of the local council to do that, then they would release an amount of money to us. The local council should be there to promote education, caring for elderly people, making sure we live in a safe place, and not become a wing of the security services... We've had an enormous amount of pressure... I think they are also trying to suggest that we're soft on terrorism, which is completely wrong (Newsnight, 2008).

This comment demonstrates that struggles over the appropriate response to the threat of terrorism reached beyond Hackney or London. It is also worth noting the assumptions made in these comments about the self-evidence of local government's role being to provide amenities for residents – and not to be part of the security services.

Throughout the life of the PVE programme occasional media coverage suggested that it encouraged local authorities to 'spy' on residents (see for example Dodd, 2009a), and other research reports based on interviews with local government practitioners have found them to be uneasy about working on a programme so closely associated with intelligence gathering for the security services (Husband and Alam, 2011; Kundhani, 2009; Turley, 2009). One element of PVE was clearly an intention to use trusted networks developed by local authorities to inform security intelligence, as I will illustrate further below. Yet, conversely, the police and security services only appeared willing or able to share a very limited amount of their own knowledge.

An example of this argument is extracted from my interview with Craig, another police officer who had worked with community cohesion and PVE issues:

Craig: We've seen that there is a counter terrorist [sic] threat, we know that because we've had attacks... we know that on account of the intelligence that's come in, I appreciate fully that most people can't – and I use the word can't with consideration, can't understand the intelligence picture... that's not because they're thick, it's because they can't be allowed access to it, if you see what I mean... but I think it's right to say that there is a tangible threat, and I... have not yet found anybody of any note or significance or who has the ability to have an impact, who would disagree with the fact that there is a counter terrorist [sic] threat.

Craig notes first the history of violent attacks, which is not in dispute. He continues by alluding to 'intelligence' which 'most people can't be allowed access to' which suggests that there is an ongoing threat. He is aware that there is some feeling that this intelligence may not be substantial, and counters this by suggesting that anyone made privy to this information is convinced by it. Such secrecy makes the intelligence difficult to work with, but the seriousness imputed to it makes it hard to ignore.

Later in the interview, I asked Craig what his views were about the specific focus on extremism in the name of Islam, rather than (for example) violent extremism linked to far right organisations. His first response was that a far right terrorist attack was 'not gonna happen' because 'we've never seen that'. When I reminded him of a recent conviction of a far-right activist for bomb-making (Dodd, 2009b) and the bombings in 1999 by David Copeland targeting ethnic minority and gay communities in London, and of recent police statements about a growing threat of far right violence (Dodd, 2009c), Craig agreed that such acts of violence 'need to be dealt with', but still insisted they were not 'the real threat'. He suggested that addressing far-right extremism might be helpful in developing acceptance of PVE by demonstrating it was not a programme of victimisation of 'people that happen to be Muslim', because 'when we talk about the far right we're not talking about white people'. Yet he then went on to argue that 'it follows' that 'the preventing violent extremism agenda focuses on Muslim communities' because 'the greatest threat comes from Al-Qaeda'. The contradiction in



this argument – that all white people are clearly not white supremacists, but that all Muslims *might* be linked to Al-Qaeda – is a straightforward reflection of the way the PVE programme was presented in national policy guidance. More broadly, these comments make clear how far 'whiteness' is being taken by Craig as an invisible and normative way of being (Frankenberg, 1993:240; Ware, 2002:92-3).

Craig also suggested that far-right extremists were less of a threat, and harder to target, because they 'are acting alone, it's really difficult to target their infrastructure'. This implies that the infrastructure of extremists acting in the name of Islam is accessible, though the only way this is targeted through the PVE scheme is by the broad focus on all Muslim communities. This is not to suggest that the rest of the government's counter-terrorism strategy does not have a more developed idea of infrastructure. However, the suggestion that the local government, community-focused part of the strategy should target extremism in the name of Islam because it has a more developed infrastructure while remaining at the level of a religious identity seems incongruous.

Whatever 'intelligence' does exist, access to it is restricted and local government practitioners are expected to take on trust that what they are told by the police and security services is substantiated. They are then asked to promote this view among local residents. In addition, local authorities are expected to pass information to the police to supplement intelligence gathering with very little reassurance about the need for this, or how information might be being used. David was one of the most senior local government officers in Hackney (if anyone within the local authority were to be made aware of security issues, it would be him) and he expressed his frustration at the way that 'intelligence' was being used:

David: The police saying... you're ranked 6th [in terms of threat of violent extremism] in the country, but, can't get any evidence to prove why we are.

Hannah: [laughs] They won't tell you why, or?

David: No, they won't share the intelligence... It seems to be based on [pause] numbers of people and numbers of educational establishments in the – so

there's a completely flawed model about why.

Hannah: Yeah. It's because lots of Muslims live... in Hackney.

David: Yeah. But then I get told by the police, oh there are real threats out there but they won't tell me what they are.

David describes the impression he has been given that the police model of 'intelligence' about extremism is flawed. The only explicit detail that has been given, even to a senior officer who is being asked to cooperate with the scheme, is that the threat level is based on the size of the Muslim population and 'educational establishments' (it is unclear here if David is referring to mainstream establishments or specifically Muslim education). Still, the spectre of 'intelligence' remains powerful, and David does not want to neglect, or be seen to neglect 'real threats' – but it is unclear how threats can be addressed when they 'won't tell [him] what they are'. Part of the power of this nebulous intelligence is that those who are privy to it are confident that anyone who knew about it would agree with them about the threat. Here, 'intelligence' is another of those terms that slips between discussion as a cause of problems (because intelligence was lacking), a source of knowledge of problems (when there is intelligence about a threat), a problem in itself (when the quest for intelligence threatens relationships with communities) and a solution to problems (if we have more intelligence, we can prevent threats). This only adds to the difficulty of discussing this subject, particularly for those without access to 'intelligence'.

Those who invoke 'intelligence' are clear about their arguments in favour of PVE, even if their reasoning might sometimes be contradictory. They see PVE as justified beyond question, by the (undisclosable) 'intelligence'. This clarity can shut down consideration of why threats have developed, or what alternative approaches might be possible. Again, there are implicit assumptions about causes and prescriptions in both the police insistence on the power of intelligence, and local government scepticism. There are differences too in the constituencies which the two organisations have to convince in order to maintain the authority of their actions (where local authorities are much more directly accountable to 'the community' via the electoral system). But while local government practitioners expressed concern that the way 'intelligence' was being used

could cast unfounded suspicions on Muslim communities at large (see also House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee, 2010:226; Husband and Alam, 2011; Kelcher, 2007; Kundnani, 2009; McLean, 2008; Reading Muslim PVE Crisis Group, 2008; Turley, 2009), national debates critiqued these practices from a quite different perspective.

Some media coverage of PVE derided both national and local government participation in the scheme for either excessive paranoia, requiring refuse collectors to 'snoop in residents' rubbish bins' (McGee, 2008; see also Dodd, 2009a) or of wasting money on projects such as 'thousands on producing T-shirts proclaiming "I love Islam"' (Reid, 2008; see also Newsnight, 2008). These stories are reminiscent of the critique of 'political correctness gone mad' in the public sector which is familiar from attacks on local government in the 1980s (see Dunant, 1994; Gordon, 1990; Lansley et al, 1989; and my discussion in Chapter Three). Like the mythologies that developed at that time, they are potent because they are grounded in some elements of fact, coupled with exaggeration and ridicule. Some of these criticisms of supposed local government incompetence even echoed the portrayals of the nationally mandated PVE scheme by local policy practitioners.

A criticism which I did not hear from local practitioners, however, was a more serious allegation that PVE funding itself was being directed at groups with their own links to extremism (e.g. Bright, 2006). This question draws on issues that go way beyond local connections or funding measures and back to international politics and the role of national and foreign policy in creating the context in which extremism erupts (Brighton, 2007; Thomas, 2010), and the lack of a viable framework at any level for understanding new forms of networks of ideology and violence (Bhatt, 2007 and 2010). The suggestion that funding meant to prevent violent extremism could actually be used to support it is ostensibly quite separate from the problems of alienating Muslim residents. The knee-jerk reaction is to assume advocates of these critiques hold respectively right- and left-wing political viewpoints. However, both of these potential problems could be assigned to a shared cause: a lack of detailed knowledge about actual functioning of extremist movements, and a push to be seen to take firm action,

resulting in hasty and perhaps counter-productive policy. This connects to questions about how the PVE fund conceptualised violent extremism, and potential interventions. These questions are not just about what interventions might be most effective in combating violence, but also about what it is practically (and politically) possible within existing frameworks of government, and ethical and social norms.

### ***Measurement***

Emma: As officers in local government, you're often from a sort of left wing liberal type background... and the idea of enforcing anything, it is tough... so community cohesion has a bit of a re-branding almost to do, because of its negative connotations, because government pushes can seem like spying... it also stinks of a sort of white British versus Muslim... And it's to do with extremism... rather than in its wider sense about how communities generally, into race issues, into age issues, all sorts of issues... need to be under the umbrella of cohesion... it seems to be used and interpreted as, we need to guard against Muslim extremism. And if we don't, if we don't do community cohesion, [clicks tongue] my god, what will happen.

This comment from Emma relates to her discussion of the performance indicators for PVE which I quoted earlier, in which she ridiculed the practicality of measuring the scheme's success through traditional means available to local government ('you just going to knock on people's doors and go, ooh are you a Muslim, is there anything the council did that distracted you from extremism?'). In this second interview extract, Emma reinforces the sense that community cohesion and PVE policies are interchangeable, which is how she sees them and how she believes local residents perceive them. She describes some potential for community cohesion to be about a broader range of questions ('into race issues, age issues, all sorts of issues'), but understands this potential to have been shut down by a focus on 'guarding against Muslim extremism'. Again she lampoons the power of the opaque intelligence used to justify this approach ('if we don't, my god, what will happen'). What is of particular

interest here though is the opening comment in this extract, where she attributes her uneasiness with the scheme to a feeling that it 'seems like spying', that local government is unused to 'enforcing' things in this way.

Emma here draws on personal political and ethical commitments, which she believes to be common among local government officers, and which she describes as 'a sort of left wing liberal type background'. This is not a party political alignment, but what might be described elsewhere as a 'public service ethos' – a commitment to public service, social justice or some other general formulation of the importance of the public good, and perhaps to the championing of the vulnerable or those in need of support. The way that PVE had been presented to her, particularly in terms of its elements of information-gathering, had made Emma wary that these commitments might be subverted by the scheme. As discussed earlier, these were suspicions shared more widely among local authority officers about the extent to which the PVE programme might lead to them becoming informants for the security services, or perceived as such.

Yet both of Emma's comments illustrate the fleeting nature of managerial engagement with these issues. Despite her apparently strong feelings on the absurdity of the project, she doesn't 'know if they ever came up with a definition for that indicator'. The PVE programme does not form part of her day-to-day work and so her outrage does not necessarily translate into a practical intervention. Rather, she demonstrates a level of knowledge of the issue and her political relationship to it (to me, in the interview) but in doing so also abdicates responsibility and distances herself from those elements of organisations she works with and within which are implementing it.

Despite Emma's suggestion that she and her colleagues were instinctively uncomfortable with what she construed as 'spying', the local state has a long-established role in collecting and modelling population data as part of planning services and predicting behaviours of, and risks to, the local population (Foucault, 1991 [1978]:99). As Husband and Alam (2011:175) observe, many local government practitioners are fluent at integrating such statistical data with local experiential

knowledge about what it might *mean*. These interpretive techniques were not always shared by the police service, as indicated by the police briefing discussed above. Nor were nuances of local knowledge always compatible with data considered as national aggregates, as in the CLG guidance on PVE being aimed at those areas with the largest Muslim populations. Perhaps partly for this reason, the blunt ways in which the PVE programme was presented created difficulties at the level of definition and measurement of impact, as well as design of implementation. These challenges were expressed to government in various forms (e.g. Kelcher, 2007; McLean, 2008; House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee, 2010) and eventually the initially proposed indicators (which mirrored very closely Emma's facetious suggestion) were replaced by more process-focused formulations (Rimmer, 2008). By 2008 NI35 success criteria for PVE had been developed into a framework which focused on the achievement of internal goals by the local authority (HM Government, 2009b), judging levels of:

- Understanding of, and engagement with, Muslim communities
- Knowledge and understanding of the drivers and causes of violent extremism and the Prevent objectives
- Development of a risk-based preventing violent extremism action plan, in support of the delivery of the Prevent objectives
- Effective oversight, delivery and evaluation of projects and action (HM Government, 2008:55-58).

Alison, who worked for an organisation that represents local government interests to national government and vice versa, suggested that these changes to the scheme's measurement and presentation were the result of dialogue between parts of government. She saw the process of negotiating the compromise itself as productive:

Alison: The feedback from some local authorities have been, we really hated this at the outset, we really felt that this was gonna do all sorts of untold damage... and almost in the process of making that point back to central

government, they actually did what they needed to do... Because they had... to go out into their communities... and have a proper dialogue with them about, this is actually an issue, do we have a role in doing anything about it? And it started to draw out some of the more unpleasant and difficult debates and tensions that you would have at a local level... Whether that's what CLG intended... not a robust, you've gotta go out and stop the terrorists, is debatable but doesn't really matter cos I think the position they've arrived at now... has got them to quite a sensible place I think.

Alison suggests that while the CLG approach may have initially been 'you've gotta go out and stop the terrorists', the resistance of local authorities to this approach and their insistence on sharing these problems with local residents in itself produced a positive result. She argues that by voicing concerns to local residents, some local authorities began to confront difficult issues about the presence of extremism with – rather than in opposition to – their residents.

What Alison's discussion does not address is that the changes to the scheme have framed it in terms which make local authorities more comfortable, a familiar move of 'polish[ing] the rough edges that do not fit neatly either side of the controversy' so that '[e]veryone seems to gain' (Trouillot, 1995:115). Producing evidence of 'knowledge and understanding', an 'action plan', 'oversight' and 'evaluation' relies on internal processes, and not on trying to measure levels of extremism or how they might have changed. What was viewed as inflammatory language in the earlier presentation of the scheme had been removed or was easier to keep to internal documents, while the premise of the scheme remained unchanged – that there was an unspecified threat from extremism in the name of Islam that should be tackled by activities focused on Muslims in areas with large Muslim populations. The existence of a government fund directed exclusively at Muslims persisted, and it did not only have the potential to risk relationships with Muslim communities who may feel victimised (whether this potential was only in the anticipation of local policy practitioners, as discussed here, or voiced by Muslim community groups, for example Reading Muslim PVE Crisis Group, 2008). It also created potential problems for other groups who were *not* eligible for the

fund to feel that Muslim populations were being unfairly *privileged*.

### ***Impacts on local relationships***

Marie: Obviously there was counter terrorism activity but there was also concern about a backlash... against Muslim communities, but also potentially a situation where people might feel that they'd have to keep their heads down because they were scared of coming anywhere near the police about issues because [pause] the hunt was on for the bombers. And so... we as a borough wanted to reassure people, that you could still contact us, you could still feed in those issues of harassment or incidents... What we discovered was there had been an escalation [in harassment]... and the cumulative effect of those low level incidents meant that some of the services and people were in genuine feelings of fear... But some of the feedback we got from mothers was that their sons were saying look we can see what's happening in Abu Ghraib,

Hannah: yeah

Marie: and we can we can see that what's happening in terms of their perception of an attack on civil liberties, and being really really reluctant to talk about people that they were suspicious of, cos... they didn't have sufficient faith in the establishment to deal with suspicion,

Hannah: yeah

Marie: without, from their perception, fitting people up. And putting them in a prison with suspended *habeas corpus* under the Terrorism Act. And never knowing if that person would get out again.

Hannah: [overlapping] yeah, yeah

Marie: [overlapping] And if they did, their life destroyed.

Hannah: yeah

Marie: ... And then... after the [pause] killing of Jean Charles de Menezes we were asked as a borough to use the networks that we'd developed through that for community reassurance, to pass out information from the Met Police, which reassured the community about – the killing of Jean Charles de Menezes.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Jean Charles de Menezes was an innocent Brazilian man who was shot in the head by police in



Hannah: mm

Marie: And I as an officer got in touch with my Cabinet Member and said I'm recommending we don't do this, because to put it bluntly I felt that what we'd got from the police was a – pack of lies, [both laugh] and... it was a very very blatant [pause] the police version of the story, which by that time was beginning to unravel. We had to take the conscious decision at that point... to decide that our relationships... with our BME communities in terms of the reassurance and trust could have been massively undermined if we'd forwarded the whole set of stories about – what had happened in Stockwell.

In this account, Marie described some of the tension which emerged from the attempts at partnership working between police and local authorities when roles become blurred, as they seemed to around the purpose and implementation of PVE and related counter terrorism work. Marie worked in equality policy, and in this interview extract she described her experience of working in a previous job for a local authority outside of my case studies, during the summer of 2005.

Marie describes firstly her concern that some local residents might feel 'scared' as a result of counter-terrorism operations. While not dismissing the need for police action on countering violence, she points out that violent backlash against Muslims (and those assumed to be Muslim) also required intervention. Marie suggests that the local authority's work should focus on supporting residents experiencing harassment, and preventing further conflict, rather than searching for criminals. The importance of local authority services being seen as separate from security and police services is emphasised in Marie's account; people were 'harassed' and 'in fear', and some of this stemmed from feeling that 'the hunt was on', and anyone could be a suspect. She reports how women in the local community reported finding it very difficult to talk to their children about whether they knew anyone who might be involved in extremist activity, in the context of political and legal developments which made them feel increasingly that civil and political rights, particularly of Muslims, were under attack. It

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Stockwell tube station on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2005. They had mistaken him for a terrorist suspect during a flawed surveillance operation. This occurred two weeks after four terrorist bombs on the London transport system killed 56 people and injured around 700 people.

seems apparent from this account that Marie was quite sympathetic with that feeling, and indeed at other points in the interview she described feeling parallels to the way that she had experienced victimisation under anti-terror laws related to Irish people in the 1980s and 1990s, when she was married to an Irish man who was unjustly arrested under the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

Where the first part of Marie's account refers to the feelings within the community and how she as an officer tried to find ways to understand them, the second part relates even more directly to the relationship between local government and the police. Marie describes receiving a request from the local police to pass out information on their behalf about the fatal shooting of a man at a tube station by counter-terrorism police. Given the local authority's role in community reassurance and the networks they had built, the police service were presumably hoping to increase the spread of their information, and to use what trust people might have in the local authority. Yet Marie was immediately wary of being asked to work in this way, for exactly that reason – because unquestioningly disseminating the police briefings would ally the two organisations even more closely for local people, and any trust (or lack of it) would be shared between the two organisations. This was not simply a disinclination to be allied with the police service, but a suspicion Marie had that the police information was 'a pack of lies'. She was quite clear that if her suspicion should turn out to be justified (which it did – see Knight, 2005), the relationships of trust between the local authority and residents would be severely damaged.

It is worth highlighting two other elements of Marie's account in contrast to the national and police understandings of PVE and related work. Firstly, towards the end of the interview extract here, Marie refers to 'relationships with our BME communities'. Earlier in the chapter, I criticised the police briefing for appearing to equate the black and minority ethnic population with the Muslim population, thereby ignoring diversity within the category of 'BME' and also that some Muslim residents may not be categorised as 'BME'. Marie also moves from talking about Muslim communities to BME communities. However, the context of Marie's comment is a long history of difficult, distrustful and sometimes violent relationships between the police force and

racialised minorities. Her argument is that an incident like the shooting of Menenzes draws on these wider histories and is likely to increase mistrust and fear of the police among a broader population of minority communities,<sup>37</sup> not just among Muslims. Menenzes, after all, was not Muslim but targeted because he was mistaken for a terrorist suspect. Secondly, Marie's account suggests that she herself also shares some suspicion of the police force and their workings, based in part on her personal experiences. This construction of her argument actually mirrors the 'intelligence' discourse of the police and national government, in that both are based on empirical events in the past which are attributed predictive power about future behaviours.

The tensions that become visible are a result of the different perspectives of national and local government. Yet another perspective exists among many voluntary and community sector organisations (as well as individual residents) who might be potential recipients of the fund, as Saida, who was directly engaged with implementing PVE in Hackney, described:

Saida: Engaging Muslim communities... sometimes can be seen as quite sensitive and quite controversial... simply because it's actually singl[ing] out a community, and if you're looking at trying to build community cohesion... then the last thing you want is to say oh hang on, we need to do some work with this community around counter terrorism stuff... and that is unsettling... anyone that belongs to a community and outside the community... plus when you've got things like funding that can be an issue as well cos other people from other communities may feel, non-Muslim communities... oh they're getting all this money and why is that, when we might need money for this and that, so - it's about striking the balance so, in the sense of Prevent strategy it was quite sort of controversial and quite sensitive for some Muslim communities.

Saida clearly had some commitment to PVE as she was working directly within its remit. However, her comments here express a degree of ambivalence, which she

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<sup>37</sup> Whether or not these relationships may have improved more recently, for example in the aftermath of the MacPherson Report (see Chapter Three).

attributes to local residents (PVE 'sometimes can be seen as quite sensitive'). Though she does describe the programme as 'sort of controversial and quite sensitive for some Muslim communities', this is only after discussing the effects of the programme on other groups. Firstly, she describes how the focus on Muslims could be 'unsettling' for 'anyone that belongs to a community and outside the [Muslim] community' presumably because they would be led to believe that Muslims in general are associated with terrorism. She then raises the issue of competition for funds. As my own experience of developing PVE indicated, in practice complaints also came from groups not eligible for the money, who simply wanted the additional funding available through PVE.

Saida was one of the few Muslim practitioners I interviewed, and this could also have played some part in her relationship to the programme. While many of the white, middle class professionals I interviewed were, to some extent, asserting their 'left wing liberal type' credentials by expressing their solidarity with Muslims targeted by PVE, perhaps Saida was performing a similar move in a different direction, asserting her understanding of the views of 'other communities, non Muslim communities'. The difference between the positions available to different practitioners may also relate to their levels of involvement in the scheme, and to a need to justify one's own alignment with a particular policy (see Chapter Seven for a more detailed explanation; and Husband and Alam, 2011:168-73).

As noted above, one organisation contacted me in Hackney about concerns that funds might be *rejected* by the local authority, and that this would constitute *neglect* of local Muslim communities' needs. This might be understood in the context of a super-diverse local area in which policy practitioners perceived there to be multiple ethnic, religious and other identity groups with specific needs and different forms of access to power. For example, it is well-established that the charedi Jewish population is both relatively large<sup>38</sup> and vocal, with well-developed lobbying techniques for presenting

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<sup>38</sup> The charedi community is estimated to be 7% of Hackney's population (London Borough of Hackney, 2011:2) and the largest such community in the world outside New York and Israel (Mayhew and Harper, 2008:5).

their social, cultural and economic needs to local statutory organisations.<sup>39</sup> There is a risk that aligning need with identity groups in this way within a competitive culture of bidding for public funds can create community cohesion problems in itself.

This was a question raised in relation to community cohesion by both Cantle's original report (2001:24), and later in a different form by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007:160-4). Where Cantle argued that area-based allocation of funds had created inter-ethnic tensions because different identity groups saw each other as being favoured by the local state, the COIC focused specifically on funds allocated on the basis of group identity, which they argued had a similar effect. Both suggested that resentment can be inspired by targeted funding perceived to be privileging one or other group. Yet there is rarely a shortage of organisations wishing to receive these funds, however potentially divisive. In the economy of the voluntary and community sector in Britain, which through the 2000s received an increasing amount of public funds for provision of services (Flood, 2010), the imperative to maintain income to deliver organisational goals in a context of scarce resources means that funding, from whatever source, is highly sought after.

In both the systems critiqued by Cantle and by the COIC, the majority of such funds are allocated on the basis of economic or social need, where the data that identifies inequality suggests it is associated with disadvantage of a particular geographical neighbourhood or identity group. They are not usually allocated *simply* on the basis that an area or identity group, in itself, should receive more funds. Yet this appeared to be *exactly* what the PVE fund proposed. The documents that set out the rationale for the funding to local government and communities provided no evidence, qualitative or quantitative, that where it was targeted would prevent violent extremism; it just had to be spent on Muslims. It was not just a basic political or practical opposition to this

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<sup>39</sup> The charedi community was cited frequently in interviews as the most obvious example of a bounded (or 'cohesive') community in Hackney. The charedi community has strict rules about diet, schooling, gender roles and use of communal services, and in Hackney the community has a number of strong advocates who articulate its specific needs and lobby the council in this regard. However, for reasons of space I have not been able to provide a detailed discussion of these relationships in my thesis. For more information about Hackney's charedi community see Holman and Holman, 2002.

aspect of the project that troubled many policy practitioners. As I described, there was potential to incorporate funding directed at Muslims with other streams of funding for the general population which could have potentially overcome some of these difficulties. In some sense, it was the central government insistence that agencies be *seen* to be doing PVE, and that it be promoted in these terms, that caused the most difficulty for policy practitioners attempting to negotiate local sensitivities.

### ***Communication and presentation***

Sam: We had quite a big fight with DCLG about the Preventing Violent Extremism Fund... just the name made a number of boroughs say that they didn't want the money if that's what it had to be called and I think we were the one, the last one that held out, and said, well okay we'll take it only if we don't have to flag up locally that that's what it's called and as long as we don't have a Minister rocking up and saying, if there was a particularly successful project, oh this is great and it's all part – to do with this.

The interviews I conducted with policy practitioners took place about a year after the initial negotiations over the Pathfinder fund, in which I had been directly involved. The memory of those wrangles still rankled, as in this interview with Sam, a senior politician in Hackney. The importance Sam places on the language and presentation of the scheme is clear. This could be easy to dismiss as a superficial question of branding or public relations, but issues of communication were particularly important to how practitioners perceived their role. Relationships with real people in local communities were at stake for officers and politicians, and I and many of those I spoke with felt strongly that the name of this scheme and some of its central tenets would not only undermine the potential to prevent extremism, but could also threaten broader relationships of trust within communities and between local government and residents.

Sam's account constructs this negotiation as a tussle between the local authority and central government ('we had quite a big fight'). In this, the local authority is portrayed as heroic ('we were the last one that held out') and victorious (accepting the fund but only on certain conditions). This is the same chain of events which I described in my own account earlier in this chapter. Sam seems to be demonstrating a similar pride to that I described personally, at having at least tried to resist the problematic aspects of this scheme. And he also positions himself in a way which echoes my account, describing a distinction between local and national parts of government and demonstrating a personal distance from the PVE scheme.

Communication and presentation are important in policy negotiations on a number of different levels. As already discussed, the political tasks of managing relations with and between different communities and groups are understood by policy practitioners to rely on a sensitive understanding and use of language and the way this language leads to the construction of services and distribution of funding. Such narratives also allow policy practitioners to demonstrate a personal connection to (or distancing from) responsibility for interventions and imputed political positions. Thus in recounting my experience of negotiating the PVE fund I have made it clear that I had several concerns about the premises of the fund and the likely impacts it would have; and I have tried to provide a convincing narrative of how I (with colleagues) tried to address these concerns and the reasons for our actions. This can also be said of Sam's narrative. Sam and I were positioned differently in relation to these negotiations: he as politically responsible to (and reliant on) a local electorate and his national political party; I as interpreting national policy and local needs and framing possible responses as a functionary of the bureaucratic structures of the local authority. But we were both well aware that local residents and national organisations would make little distinction either between the differences in (for example) our two positions, or more importantly between us as individuals acting within local government, and the local authority as a whole. Hence my 'pride' in seeming to have found a compromise solution, my worries about representing the authority to organisations who claimed to have been neglected in former service planning decisions, and Sam's insistence that 'we held out'. These are negotiations in which we (as policy practitioners) have both an institutional and a

personal stake. The importance of presenting this as a struggle between parts of government is partly about demonstrating that the institution of which we form a part is capable of taking an ethical stance similar to that we might wish to have taken as individuals (see Chapter Seven). By 'ethical stance', I do not mean to imply taking a moral high ground; rather, I am treating ethical practice as a weighing up of choices, reflecting on and making – perhaps impossible – decisions between finite goods (Mayo et al, 2007; Mouffe, 2000; Sayer, 2005).

While my assessment of Sam's narrative may have sounded somewhat cynical, in that the 'victory' over national policy in this case was rather limited, the negotiations over the importance of language, communication and conception of the PVE scheme did appear to have some effects. This was the result of concerns expressed by local authorities across the country, not just in Hackney (House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee, 2010). Alison, from her position between national and local government, reflected on these negotiations:

Alison: Somebody in CLG did actually say to me at one point, well if we let them call it community cohesion they'll hide behind [it] and they won't do anything about preventing violent extremism and I just think that's bollocks, I don't think that's the case at all, I don't [think] the reason that authorities call it community cohesion locally is because they don't want to deal with PVE, I think it's because they're uncomfortable with the language, they know that it won't play well with local communities etc etc, so CLG have shifted and said you can call it what you like locally but you're still doing PVE.

Alison was of the opinion that PVE work did need to be tackled separately to community cohesion, to deal with specific issues around involvement in violent extremism. But here she expresses some sympathy for the way that some local authorities attempted to re-brand (or de-brand) PVE 'because they're uncomfortable with the language, *they know it won't play well with local communities*'. She tries to promote a more sophisticated view than the initial CLG official she quotes, who thought that local authorities were simply 'hiding behind' the community cohesion



label. The solution that CLG eventually came to was that local authorities could tailor language as they wished, but must still take specific actions to counter extremism in the name of Islam. Thus Alison presents herself as between the central and local government sides of the argument (as indeed is her role) and as even-handedly understanding their different perspectives. Yet she also emphasises the power of the centre: 'you're still doing PVE'.

There were some signs, towards the end of the period covered by this research, that the approach of national government to PVE shifted slightly.<sup>40</sup> In a speech in October 2009, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State Shahid Malik indicated that Government had listened to local community concerns about the language of the programme, and that they would now refer to the scheme as Prevent, 'removing the "violent extremism" label from funding' to help local communities contextualise the funding (Malik, 2009) (though what else were they 'preventing'?). Though Malik reiterated that the main focus of work should remain on 'the Al Qaeda influenced threat', a space was opened in the debate to consider other forms of terrorism and violent extremism. This echoed John Denham, Secretary of State for Communities' speech a week earlier, in which he indicated that right-wing racist extremism would also become a focus of specific action by the CLG (Denham, 2009). How far this shift in political rhetoric was influenced by the arguments of local policy practitioners, or by other political calculations, is unclear.

### ***Conclusions***

This chapter has discussed problems in the conception, design, implementation and presentation of the Preventing Violent Extremism programme, by focusing on how such problems were identified, described and negotiated by local policy practitioners in

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<sup>40</sup> While these developments suggest a broadening of the approach, a significant review of the Prevent programme was announced by the coalition government in July 2010 (Travis, 2010). In 2011, they announced a greater focus on security and an end to the community development aspects of the Prevent programme (HM Government, 2011).

Hackney. In doing so, I have discussed the different perspectives and priorities that policy practitioners have, depending on how they are located within structures and cultures of government and governing institutions. While I have made clear my own personal views on the PVE programme, I have also taken seriously the accounts of those with different perspectives on the programme and on the wider role of governing institutions. The central criticism of the national programme and the way it was handled and promoted locally by the police, was that it lacked sensitivity to local populations or understanding of how people and organisations react to, interpret and engage with policy interventions. To engage with these weaknesses would have required a great deal more time and detailed work, and this appeared to conflict with an urgency to be seen to be 'stopping the terrorists'. This weakness led to criticisms such as those I have engaged with at length here, about the impacts on people placed unfairly under suspicion. It also contributed to criticisms elsewhere that PVE and the wider counter-terrorist programme were counter-productive because they were wasting money on pointless exercises or supporting damaging organisations (e.g. Bright, 2006). The broader criticism – about the initial premises of the PVE scheme which imagined a problem (terrorism) whose causes and solutions could be found by interventions at the level of local extremists – was raised at various moments in this narrative, but in the end was silenced by the search for more pragmatic ways to negotiate this difficult subject, using vaguer language, less clear about this bypassing of causes of terrorism or extremism which might be found in more global structures of power.

While I have particularly criticised the police and security services' conceptions of communities and the ways that populations should be managed and talked about, I do not want to suggest that the approach more common among local government practitioners (with which I have aligned myself) is unproblematic. What surprised practitioners about the PVE programme was not the aim to collect information on Muslims or the assumption that all Muslims were potential terrorists. Most of those I spoke with through the research had varying levels of awareness of institutional racism and its histories in both police and local and national government policies. This has often involved actions which victimise, demonise, or otherwise impact on some

racialised groups more than others. What was 'new' in PVE was that all of the guidance and monitoring of the scheme was *explicitly* targeted at one religious group. There was no attempt to hide this focus.

The local authority approach of incremental negotiation to try to meet the different sensitivities of different constituencies might be accused of masking, rather than dealing with, institutional discrimination. However, direct challenge may not be the most effective means of change from within government, given that the attempt to challenge national policy directly by creating a different local approach was simply ignored. The tactics of negotiation, which allow for reinterpretation and flexibility of meaning, may be more effective means of subverting problematic policies.

We have also seen, in this chapter, how the meaning and purpose of local government is both treated as self-evident, and questioned by its juxtaposition with demands that don't fit a 'self-evident' role. The emphasis that local government practitioners put on *relationships* and *negotiations* may have been related to idealism about their role (as 'left wing liberal types'), or equally about identifying what tools were available to them in governing. When silent power relations became articulated as baldly as they did by PVE policy's suspicion of an entire demographic group, discomfort among policy practitioners was palpable. In this case, this overt language and practice was quietly modified back to a more ambiguous framework relating to internal processes. *Muslim* extremists were still understood to be the primary focus of PVE, but more 'polite' ways were found to discuss this.

In this chapter I have paid a great deal of attention to the nuances of reflection among local policy practitioners, and have tended to treat 'central government', and to some extent 'the police' as monolithic, homogeneous entities. They are also, of course, internally variegated organisations with disagreements, internal conflicts, different objectives, competing priorities and ongoing negotiations. The research I have conducted, being situated within local government looking outwards at national structures, provides less detail on the variegation in national government priorities and negotiations. This in itself is important; even when recognising complexity, more

distant structures or ideas need to be simplified for the sake of understanding (see also the reflections on ideas of place in Chapters 5 and 6). While in this chapter I have concentrated on local negotiations of a specific policy that is aligned with community cohesion policy, in the next chapter I will go on to discuss understandings of community cohesion within narratives of place and time in a single borough. In doing so, I take a step away from my personal narrative to consider more fully the representations of place and belonging attached to 'Hackney' in the practice of policy.

## Chapter Five: I Love Hackney/Keep It Crap

### *Introduction*

In this chapter, I move from the examination of how a specific subject of policy (preventing violent extremism) was negotiated in a particular place (Hackney), to consider how the subject of 'Hackney' itself is articulated in policy narratives and negotiations. A sense of place and shared belonging have been incorporated into considerations of community cohesion policy partly as a way of trying to negotiate more difficult subjects of difference by imagining a neutral, shared, neighbourhood space. But this chapter demonstrates a set of competing claims about the meaning of a place – and about authenticity, narrative, histories, futures, power, class and identity. These debates suggest that far from providing a neutral ground for a simple shared coherence, places exist as both shared and contested meanings, grounded in and experienced through competing narratives in emotional registers.

This chapter explores a set of overlapping narratives about the meaning of a place – Hackney – and who is included or gets to speak for its local 'community'. Each narrative appeals to emotive associations with symbols of authenticity including claims to be marginalised or to understand marginalisation through identification with Hackney. I consider how the resonances of the local authority's branding strategies for Hackney re-appropriated meanings and associations, and how others re-interpreted and subverted that Hackney brand. As I am looking specifically at meanings within policy practice, the voices of 'people on the street' are largely silent in this discussion. Though community consultation is required by national regulations to form part of local authority narrative construction, this does not necessarily mean that such street-level voices are heard directly in policy-making, or indeed that if they were heard they would be as progressive as the people I interviewed sometimes imagined (Keith, 2005:153). These 'real people' are, however, frequently spoken *for*. Policy practitioners often presented their narratives of Hackney as being those of authentic residents, and as counter-claims against the perceptions of outsiders, or against other vocal image-

makers. The power of 'celebrity' critics was a particular preoccupation of many of the policy practitioners with whom I spoke, and two names in particular kept coming up. Michael Rosen and Iain Sinclair are both local residents, writers and public figures, and have both been involved in public arguments with the local authority over regeneration and change in the borough. Because of the significance these two figures appeared to have gained in local policy negotiations and narratives of place, I chose to interview them both, and to use the resulting data in this chapter. Though neither Sinclair or Rosen are 'policy practitioners', their interventions have become part of the narrative of place used by policy practitioners and I wanted to give them an opportunity to reflect on these entanglements in the same way as the others whose narratives I consider here.<sup>41</sup>

For many of my interviewees, Rosen and Sinclair had come to symbolise a particular form of middle class gentrification. The relationship of middle class gentrifiers to the places they inhabit in the inner city (and specifically in Hackney) has been discussed at length elsewhere (e.g. Butler, 1997; Butler and Robson, 2003; May, 1996; Reay, 2008; Reay et al, 2007; Savage et al, 2005).<sup>42</sup> Very often, there is a conclusion that many middle class inhabitants of poor and ethnically diverse areas enjoy living there because they can choose to opt in and out of the excitement of multicultural inner city life. That is, they are able to claim an affinity with what they perceive as 'exotic' or 'different', and thereby increase their cultural capital (knowledge of others, superiority over suburban 'normality') while remaining able (by virtue of their economic capital) to retreat into more privileged and safer environments (Bourdieu, 1986; Skeggs, 2004). My discussion in this chapter does not necessarily undermine that assessment, but I add to it in two ways. Firstly, the negotiations over the meaning of Hackney are not separate from sociological analysis. They might be understood as 'public sociology' as outlined in Chapter One, where sociological imaginations are applied outside the

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<sup>41</sup> Because Rosen and Sinclair were both interviewed as public figures, it would have been absurd to attempt to anonymise their comments in the way I have the other interview data. They both agreed that their comments be attributed.

<sup>42</sup> The policy practitioners I interviewed were, by definition, middle class themselves, and many resided in inner London – and I will explore in more detail how they negotiated their own personal implication in local processes of change in Chapter Seven.

academic arena, and research participants are able to draw on sociological resources to negotiate their own place within government. For example, criticisms of the council's policies and place-marketing often draw on arguments about appeals to private capital and neglect of communities which can be found in gentrification literature; and policy practitioners in turn accuse their opponents of exoticising poor and ethnic 'others' for their own benefit.

Secondly, many interviewees refer to a group of gentrifiers who are against (a particular type of) gentrification, and who are trying to protect a nostalgic past which maintains some of the difficulties of living in Hackney which made their own journey so 'pioneering' – and also exclusive (and therefore provided profoundly greater cultural capital). What is interesting is that, like 'the community', for the most part such unreflexive gentrifiers are always absent. Though of course the purpose of my research design was not to seek them out, it is notable that such views are always *attributed*, but never *admitted*. Instead, all of those participants I encountered discussed how to some extent they were implicated in and personally benefited from gentrification in the borough, but also wanted to highlight their motivations and why their own nuanced position was different, and superior, to that they perceived others to hold. This self-positioning in relation to an (imagined) outside resonates with the tendency (to be explored in Chapter Six) of many research participants to define their own sense of place (or achievement of community cohesion) in relation to perceived failings elsewhere.

I begin the chapter by providing a flavour of the mythologies of Hackney that circulate in policy and public discussions, through a 'collage' of artefacts representing Hackney in different ways. By juxtaposing some of the competing but inter-related representations of the borough, and then discussing their positionings, I do not claim to provide a definitive description of the place, but to provide a guide to the narratives and issues that constitute Hackney, and their various connections to different forms of empirical fact and experience.

Having set the scene, I introduce the 'I Love Hackney' branding campaign, and consider

how its local resonances appear to have gone beyond a simple adaptation of the 'I Love X' formula copied from New York by so many localities and other brands. One much-discussed aspect of this in my research interviews was the multiplicities of 'Hackneys' people might love, and the various claims to what might be the 'real' Hackney. I discuss this in relation to public arguments over the right to speak for Hackney, its past, present and future, and the ensuing 'Keep It Crap' publicity campaign which accused the 'I Love Hackney' campaign of 'gentrification' against authentic local wishes (a claim hotly disputed by many of my interviewees).

I probe these local public disputes further by considering the directly oppositional stances taken by local authority policy practitioners, and some of the more outspoken local opponents of gentrification. It seemed at times that there was no point at which the two groups would agree – particularly about who was 'really' cynically appropriating the 'authentic' cultural capital of the area. But greater attention the discussions on both sides reveals similar discomforts and concerns about inequalities in access to public space, consumption and participation in public life shared between members of these two differently (politically) positioned groups. My data also suggests that both groups are well aware of their own implication in processes of change and exclusion.

I then introduce this material to an analysis which draws on sociological thinking on branding, and through this I consider how place-myths and narratives follow the unruly paths outlined in the empirical data. I suggest that these negotiations should be understood through the lens of cultural capital exchange, where the branding of Hackney makes it possible for different constituencies to profit in different ways from their association with Hackney's various connotations. As outlined in the earlier parts of the chapter, such machinations are often understood and described by participants, many of whom discuss their own role and position within this. I suggest that very often the different brandings and re-brandings of Hackney draw on mythologies situated in time. Through this they attempt to establish a nostalgic authenticity based on community, sometimes looking to the past (as in a golden age of community, or in places which have failed to embrace multicultural), and at others to the future (as in



traditional certainties of community threatened by migration and new forms of rights, or in places where difference and fluidity is the comfortable norm). But I will begin by setting the scene, using a collage of textual images to address the question 'what is Hackney?'.

### ***What is Hackney?***

**(1)** *Hackney is an inner London borough in the north east of the city, 18.98 square kilometres of land,<sup>43</sup> 3.3 square kilometres of green space,<sup>44</sup> 207,000 people, 86,042 households, 97,000 jobs, 11,000 unemployed, 44% of the population is White British, 37.7% of the population aged under 20 are dependent on someone on income support, 32.9% of the population aged 16-74 have a degree or equivalent qualification, 29% of the same group have no qualifications, 12.9% of 18 year olds enter higher education, house prices rose 176.6% between 2000 and 2005, Hackney was the only inner London borough without a tube line until the East London Line extension opened in 2010, is one of the five London boroughs to host the 2012 Olympics, had an average crime rate higher than London as a whole by 10.2 per thousand population in 2003-4, has an average life expectancy more than a year shorter than the London and national averages (LBH, 2006a). Hackney is consistently ranked among the top four most deprived areas in the country (Noble et al, 2009). 78% of residents agree that people from different backgrounds get along well in the area (Ipsos-MORI, 2009:39).*

**(2)** Hackney has enormous strength and great opportunities. We are in the centre of London, one of the world's most thriving cities. The people who live here have come from many different ethnic backgrounds and brought cultural diversity and vitality to the borough. The population is young, so has real prospects to improve its life chances. The borough itself is, in many respects a good place to live, with busy vibrant areas, strong communities and attractive open spaces.

But many of the benefits of growing prosperity in the capital have not extended to us. While other parts of London experience pockets of deprivation, every ward in Hackney is among the 10 percent most deprived wards nationally.

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<sup>43</sup> <http://www.hackney.gov.uk/xp-factsandfigures-geography.htm> [last accessed 4<sup>th</sup> April 2010]

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.hackney.gov.uk/cp-community-parks.htm> [last accessed 4<sup>th</sup> April 2010]

There are many problems facing us: poor skills and attainment levels, high mobility, a weak transport system, high levels of crime and poor environmental conditions.

Increasingly Hackney is also experiencing a polarisation of its community between richer and poorer groups while those with moderate incomes choose, or are forced, to live elsewhere. This polarisation can only harm the prospects for our borough. It makes it increasingly difficult for people to see pathways out of poverty – to become economically active, successful and stay in the borough. It makes it more difficult to recruit to the jobs which are needed to service our community (LBH, 2006b:3).

*(3) In the interview, Smith, the first woman home secretary, was asked whether she would feel safe walking on her own around Hackney at midnight. She replied: 'Well, no, but I don't think I'd ever have done. You know, I would never have done that, at any point during my life' Asked why not, she answered: 'Well, I just don't think that's a thing that people do, is it, really?' (Oakeshott, 2008).*

*(4) Hackney is well known for being one of the most diverse areas in the country. It is a place where you can walk past Turkish supermarkets, Jamaican takeaways, fish and chip shops or Nigerian restaurants on one road. It is an area where mosques, synagogues and churches lie within five minutes of each other. Living in Hackney means having diversity at your fingertips... For me, Hackney is a microcosm of multicultural Britain and there are many lessons the rest of the country could learn from community relations here (Abbott, 2008).*

*(5) 'Ms Mop heroine sees off raiders: Raiders come unstuck in jewellery heist'*

*'11-year-old girl raped on her way to school: Police arrest 46-year-old man after attack on Well Street Common'*

*'Hitman, 15, moaned about fee, jury told: Youth complained he only got £200 for killing woman, court hears'*

*'Gangland arms cache hidden in graveyard: Knives and skewers found after routine police sweep'*

*(Hackney Gazette front page headlines, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup>, 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011).*

*(6) Hackney east of Well Street Market is where you'll find genuine bona fide artists in genuine bona fide crumbling warehouses. See through the dour landscape of flyovers, lock-ups and lap-dancing clubs, and you'll discover a neighbourhood of Somali cafes and tasty Turkish grills, vast, atmospheric green spaces such as Victoria Park and Hackney Marshes, and a fierce local*

community. And prospects: the Olympics site abuts (Dyckhoff, 2008).

*(7) So if you've got the Council, Hackney, worst performing - now not! But you know, when it was, Hackney probably needed to hear that at one time [laughs] (interview with Rob, senior local government officer in Hackney).*

*(8) Many people say I love Hackney but... you put an image in front of them and they wouldn't necessarily know [that it's in Hackney] (interview with Angela, senior local government officer in Hackney).*

As this collage illustrates, there are many ways to describe Hackney. I have presented this selection of representations not to cancel one another out, but to demonstrate how these different experiences exist alongside, and are intertwined with, one another. As the wider thesis is about how policy practitioners negotiate difficult subjects in the process of governing, I am interested in how these different meanings of place (a difficult subject) are negotiated in policy practice. I am not trying to expose a difference between an objective reality and representations of Hackney, nor do I want to argue for an extreme relativism in which all images of a place are equally valid (Keith, 2005:72; Keith and Pile, 1993:6). I do, however, want to give a sense of the empirical place for the uninitiated. I also mean to highlight that the representations of place used in government are themselves multiple; that they claim authenticity through scientific measurement or to local intimacy; and that they are used strategically both to negotiate policy at national and local levels and to make sense of the personal positions, commitments and roles of individual policy practitioners within the institutions of governance.

As such, the opening paragraph of this section **(1)** is a representation of Hackney in which I present, through words and numbers, administratively important data derived from numerous sources of empirical enquiry. Like all of the sources, it could be criticised for its limited ability to capture reality, either from the point of view of methodology, timeliness, missing of particular populations,<sup>45</sup> missing of the point. This

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<sup>45</sup> See London Borough of Hackney, 2010, which includes a discussion of the difficulties of data collection and updated, but still not definitive, population estimates.

type of description is related to and co-existent with materiality, as are the various more literary, emotional or experiential descriptions I include below it. Just as the material realities that these descriptions attempt to represent are important in how individuals and populations live and experience their lives, so are the narratives and emotions that attach to them. As artefacts of data they are important not only in how government prioritises local and national interventions, but how populations make choices about where to live, how to behave, and who to vote for. And, like all of the elements of this collage, this representation is a snapshot in time, and made from a particular vantage point, to meet a particular set of interests.

The extract that follows **(2)** is the local authority's attempt to condense this data into a narrative of place that encompasses both the difficulties and the positive attributes of Hackney. When working as a policy practitioner within Hackney, I became accustomed to producing such narratives. They are crafted to negotiate a precarious position, presenting the borough to a variety of audiences. Such narratives must be both acceptable and recognisable to residents (who of course are a diverse lot themselves); and they must present Hackney as a place that is both attractive for outsiders, and deserving of support. To be overwhelmingly positive would not only belie the realities of local struggles, but would potentially put at risk political capital for national government support in addressing issues of deprivation, exclusion or poverty. To be overwhelmingly negative would again belie realities, and would alienate those with a deep attachment to Hackney. It also risks opening the local authority to the accusation that its stewardship of the area had been seriously lacking, and could put local private sector investment in jeopardy.

The next artefact **(3)** is an extract from a newspaper profile of the then Home Secretary, Jacqui Smith, in which she suggested that she would not feel safe alone at night in Hackney. It does not seem, from the context of the interview, that Hackney was under discussion in the rest of the interview. Rather, the journalist used it as shorthand for the unsafe inner city. When Smith suggests that it's not 'a thing that people do', 'people' can be assumed to be those of a similar class, gender, age and perhaps ethnic background to herself. The potential political consequences of such a straightforward

yet casual equation of Hackney with danger (and 'others' who are more routinely exposed to such danger) is reinforced by a later episode in the same newspaper article:

Later an aide calls me fretting about these comments. The home secretary might have given the wrong impression and meant no slight to Hackney. In fact the boss went and bought a kebab on the mean streets of Peckham, southeast London, after dark the other day (Oakeshott, 2008).

Here, as well as highlighting the politician's wish to avoid causing affront to an otherwise politically friendly local authority, the exchange makes it clear that Hackney was simply a metonym; not a place itself, but a stand-in for all those places that are avoided after midnight by those able to do so. This is reinforced by the retreat – that the minister was out in Peckham instead recently – where Peckham is equivalent to Hackney in its potential for crime and danger. In my interviews with policy practitioners in Hackney they were very aware of the negative discourses which they felt still dominated views of Hackney from outside. One way of thinking about Hackney is as a place of crime, deprivation and squalor, the typical sense of the abject inner city. The feeling that this portrayal was something to fight against was strong in my research interviews, but finding explicit examples of such depictions is not a straightforward task. The place has absorbed the connotations of the abject inner city to such an extent that it is unnecessary to spell this out in national discourse – a reference to Hackney in an article on knife crime, teenage pregnancy or street gangs, it seems, is sufficient to set the scene of danger, neglect or immorality.

But this characterisation is followed, in my collage, by an extract from a column in the local commercial newspaper, the *Hackney Gazette*, written by the Member of Parliament for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (and Britain's first black woman MP), Diane Abbott (4). Entitled 'Multicultural Marvel', this account was a typical celebration of Hackney's welcoming, exciting (ethnic and religious) diversity – as typical as the more negative *Times* piece quoted above it. These narratives are produced in conversation with one another. In Abbott's account, Hackney is proposed as standing *not* for the dangerous inner city, but as 'a microcosm of multicultural Britain' from

which others should learn. This is Hackney as the multicultural ideal which as I argued in Chapter Three is one way various actors have tried to reposition Hackney in the wider geographic and political imaginary.

This ideal is disrupted by the set of headlines **(5)** taken from the front page of the *Hackney Gazette* (the same paper in which Abbott's regular column appears) during one month in 2011. These four headlines are shocking reports of violent crime in the area; the missing week's headline was an attack on the local authority's (potential) profligacy at a time of public spending cuts. The consistency of this type of coverage in the Gazette, coverage which presents Hackney as violent, dangerous and corrupt, was the source of much concern and anger within the local authority when I worked there. These headlines were all unmissable on the front pages.<sup>46</sup> However, they were usually accompanied by a smaller – and much more uplifting – picture story: for example, on 10<sup>th</sup> March, the headline about the rape of a school-child was offset by 'Cabbie Ishmail helps deliver Chloe's baby in the back of his taxi'. The 'gangland arms cache' story on 31<sup>st</sup> March was published alongside a large picture of a young child wearing tiger facepaint, with the caption 'It's fun in the sunshine', reporting on a community event held by a housing association. The prioritisation of shocking news to sell papers was offset by the need for a good picture and the appeal of heart-warming stories, which can also evidently be found in Hackney.<sup>47</sup>

These reports of crime and danger are interrupted by an extract from a property column in *The Guardian's* Weekend Magazine **(6)**, in which Hackney Wick is considered as a home relocation destination and investment opportunity. Though somewhat tongue-in-cheek with its references to 'genuine bona fide artists in genuine bona fide crumbling warehouses', this is also a typical estate agent or property speculator's assessment of the area. The 'dour landscape' presents an opportunity for the discerning home-buyer/explorer to discover exotic foods and hidden parkland; and to make money from the 'prospects' of the Olympic site. Thus this column neatly

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<sup>46</sup> See [www.hackneygazette.co.uk/home/e-edition](http://www.hackneygazette.co.uk/home/e-edition).

<sup>47</sup> The 3<sup>rd</sup> March story about a cleaner chasing away would-be jewel thieves managed to combine the elements of crime and humour (and a picture of an attractive young woman) in one story.

encapsulates the potential for those with sufficient (and the right sort) of both economic and cultural capital to profit from investing in a part of the inner city with just the right amount of danger and exoticism – and civilisation.

The histories of Hackney Council's reputation as an irresponsible, incompetent, corrupt or 'loony left' institution in the 1980s and as poorly managed (financially, politically, and in terms of local services) in the 1990s (see Chapter Three) lie behind Rob's comment **(7)**. He suggests that Hackney (in this case, the Council as institution, rather than the place itself) has had troubled histories, from which it has learnt and moved on ('worst performing – now not!'). Not only is this improvement celebrated, but the journey from 'worst' to 'well' performing<sup>48</sup> is considered a heroic achievement in a way that it would not be in an organisation that had always been well run. Like the other elements of this collage, Rob's comments take on specific meanings when understood in relation to the other narratives.

Finally, Angela suggested **(8)** that while it is easy to elicit claims to 'love' Hackney, what 'Hackney' actually means to people who love it can vary widely. Angela was a senior local authority officer with responsibility for community development. She discussed in our interview how she had grown up in Hackney, which was unusual among my interviewees although a large proportion of them now lived in the borough. Angela only brought this up, however, when the interview turned to a discussion of school experiences in Hackney – she did not draw more generally on her long attachment to the place as a marker of authenticity (see Chapter Seven). Instead, she demonstrated an awareness of how, as a middle class manager, her experience of Hackney was simply one among many others, situated within power relations, time and space:

Angela: It's a very stable borough in many, you know, on the surface but actually, you just go and stand in the market! [all laugh]... You know, as policy people we might not always stand in the market and if you're out at particular times of the evening you will pick up stuff that you don't pick up ordinarily. And it's

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<sup>48</sup> Hackney Council was judged to be a well performing local authority by the national inspection body, the Audit Commission in 2008.

those things are just below the surface, I think, that [we] need to look at how we manage.

Angela talks about experiences 'below the surface'. Though she sees real improvements in Hackney ('it's a very stable borough'), there are other places not normally seen by her ('in the market') where the picture may be different. In doing so, she not only implies that multiple experiences of the place co-exist, and that her own experience may be incomplete. She also reinforces a sense of authenticity of her own account *despite* this multiplicity. By recognising experiences that differ to her own, her narrative is made to appear more balanced and grounded; and potential criticism that her view may be partial seems to be neutralised. She incorporates alternative experiences, in order to assert a stable vision of place. It is an uncomfortable negotiation, but perhaps necessary to negotiate the managing and governing of place.

This collage has provided a selection of my primary data demonstrating a set of ideas and imaginings of Hackney. In Butler and Robson's (2003a) research with middle class residents of Hackney, they found that many of their interviewees identified with a 'Hackney of the mind' (p177), which they suggest is connected to ideas of authenticity embedded in oppositional working class histories (see also Butler and Robson, 2003b:1802). My data suggests there are rather more versions of this 'Hackney of the mind' than given credit by Butler and Robson. As Angela says, meanings of Hackney are shifting, overlapping, sometimes contradictory. They exist in tension with and rely upon one another. They have similar themes at their heart, but they approach these themes differently.

There is also a wealth of more detailed writing on the borough, ranging between literary, journalistic and social scientific engagements; but here I am most interested in how the borough is understood and the idea of it is managed in policy worlds. While my discussion will suggest that these various policy-oriented 'Hackneys of the mind' do interact with the other uses and imaginings of Hackney that circulate in popular culture and social science, it is not part of this project to catalogue such reinventions comprehensively here, or to judge them as more or less accurate accounts. Instead, I



suggest that these debates are *not* really about establishing the truth of either a symbolic or empirical meaning. As Trouillot (1995) demonstrates, history is not only about process or events, but also about the ways those events are remembered through narrative. In his example, the history of the Haitian revolution has been partly erased, partly made banal, as

apologists and detractors alike, abolitionists and avowed racists, liberal intellectuals, economists, and slave owners used the events of Saint-Domingue to make their case, without regard to Haitian history as such. Haiti mattered to all of them, but only as pretext to talk about something else (Trouillot, 1995:97).

In a more local example, Michael Keith notes how in 1980s Brixton the term 'Front Line' became 'an organising theme of completely contradictory rationalisations' of local conflict (Keith, 2005:71). Similarly in Hackney, the *idea of the place* itself – its 'brand' – becomes an organising theme of contradictory rationalisations of urban change. This was demonstrated clearly through explicit conflicts about the control of meaning and brand related to the 'I Love Hackney' publicity campaign.

### ***I Love Hackney/Keep it Crap***

Laura: What do the people that at the end of the day have phenomenal power in the policy making field... really think of Hackney? Have they actually been here?... we won't crack all of that, but because Hackney has such a dramatic, burning past, particularly I'm talking about the Council now. You know, that is just burnt so deeply... I've never before seen a brand that'd burn flesh, and you can still see the steam rising.

Hannah: It's a funny brand though, isn't it, because it is a name that you hear of, that they don't know Haringey, or Southwark, it's a name that people know.

Laura: No, I mean when I was moving down here I actually asked... a really bright bloke both in terms of regeneration and destination marketing, visitor economy kind of stuff, but also place shaping... Hackney, he said, whoah,

that you can do stuff with that, that's a brand you can do stuff with.

Hannah: Yeah.

Laura: But you do feel that there literally is something about the absolute origin of brand and the cattle stamp... Hackney, oh yes, Hackney has a brand. People know that, people have heard of Hackney. And that's fabulous, there is a gut reaction and an instinct, and all sorts of emotional stuff about Hackney.

Hannah: Yeah.

Laura: And my only quibble with it is, is it accurate? And is it about the future, or is it about the past? And I think it's much much much more about the future, now, actually. And I think the Olympics is a massive driver in that.

Laura was a senior officer whose work was partly related to a publicity campaign of recent years based around the slogan 'I Love Hackney'. This began with an exhibition at Hackney Museum drawing on locals' memories of the borough, and indeed drawing together multiple narratives of place. A striking aspect of the exhibition was the use of a logo based on the 'I Love NY' iconography,<sup>49</sup> replacing Hackney in the motif, and later available on badges, mugs, sweatshirts, bags and other items. The publicity campaign was turned into a larger drive for civic pride, and relaunched in response to the naming of the borough as the UK's 'worst place to live' by a Channel Four property programme in 2006 (another example of the creative tension between the promotion of positive and negative images of the borough). This campaign was very popular, inside and outside Hackney – although perhaps with only certain people. When wearing my I Love Hackney badge, people asked me (elsewhere in London) if I'd ever been there. Other people have reported seeing them worn in Brighton and Oxford, by middle class exiles of Hackney.

The logo was thus worn as a fashion item, while also used as a more traditional municipal message, on posters promoting falling crime rates and encouraging recycling, and as the theme for a local photography competition celebrating the borough and what people loved about it. The campaign's crossover appeal seemed to lie with its

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<sup>49</sup> Which was itself an incredibly successful re-branding of associations of danger and desire (Kidd and Glaser, 2003), and has been copied widely across the USA and beyond.

ironic appeal to something exclusive, edgy and a little bit dangerous, quite the opposite of the municipal campaign to show Hackney as an orderly and safe place to live.<sup>50</sup>

In the interview extract above, Laura is grappling with the Hackney brand as it relates to national policy makers, rather than residents. Her concern is largely with existing ideas about the place, and the Council, its 'dramatic, burning past'. The power of the place's reputation is described vividly ('burning', 'burn flesh', 'steam rising', 'the cattle stamp'). Laura explicitly ties this to an affective, embodied impact, 'a gut reaction and an instinct, and all sorts of emotional stuff about Hackney'. Initially concerned that national policy makers may have a negative, out-dated or inaccurate view of the borough, Laura's speech quickly turned to excitement about the potential for developing the message, the brand. When she questions whether the emotion that is drawn on by the Hackney brand is 'accurate', and begins to talk about turning to the future rather than the past, Laura is describing the move that she and others have made for the local authority with the re-branding of Hackney. By taking gut reaction and emotional draw that Hackney has, connected with the fear and desire of the inner city, and harnessing it to 'the future' as symbolised by the Olympics, regeneration, and the 'vibrancy' that is so often invoked in the positive profiles of the borough, the statement 'I Love Hackney' uses the edginess of Hackney's prior associations to evoke much stronger affective ties than might come from a simple narrative of improving public services. As Laura elaborates:

Laura: There's something about defiance... I think the 'I Love Hackney' thing is about – 'I know that you think that this is a dreadful place but believe me it's not and I love it, so there'.

Laura's view was that by aligning themselves with Hackney, residents and others found common cause and a sense of community, in opposition to those who did not know or love the place in the same way. In the formulation she describes, people express pride

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<sup>50</sup> A more bizarre inflection of this, to which I referred in Chapter Three, was the unauthorised use not of the 'I Love Hackney' logo, but of the logo representing the London Borough of Hackney as a local authority, on a range of basketball shirts sold worldwide by the global sportswear company Nike – for which the local authority won damages (see LBH, 2006c; Tran, 2006).

and defiance through their claims to love Hackney, which may or may not relate to a reformulation of what the place is like. That is to say, loving Hackney in defiance may be about accepting and defending the aspects of it that others see as 'dreadful', or about suggesting that these 'dreadful' traits are not the true Hackney. Which of these it is that Laura thinks is taking place is unclear, and indeed it is probably both. Either way, she sees this emotional power as an important device for the local authority.

While the local authority and other agencies of governance (the London Development Agency, the Olympic Delivery Authority, Visit London tourist authority) have packaged 'edginess' as an attraction for residents, business investment and tourists, there is a vocal group of residents (writers, poets, artists, political activists and others) making their own claims to speak for the authentic place and to champion this 'edge' in a different way. Part of the defensive struggle for the authentic claim to love Hackney has been a tendency among some elected politicians and local officers to label as the 'Keep Hackney Crap Brigade' those who term the Council's regeneration as gentrification (or, occasionally, 'gentricide' or 'regenocide'), as in this interview with Joe, a senior politician in the borough:

Joe: There's a great mentality across all of Hackney by a load of our political opponents, of actually bizarrely now, right and left, that you know, want to keep Hackney crap, I mean Iain Sinclair, absolutely preposterous, he actually lives in Albion Square, sitting in Albion Square, saying Hackney had been ruined, it wasn't the kind of edgy place he moved to thirty years ago, look at all these flats springing up, it's like, alright, so you get to live in Albion Square, and the rest of us, and everyone else in Hackney, we should just keep it as nasty as possible so you get to feel really cool about it and write some edgy articles for the Guardian? Absolute bollocks. And offensive as well.

This interview extract makes clear Joe's sense that he and his colleagues have been striving to improve life for people in Hackney, and that their intentions, efforts and achievements are not recognised. His anger is perhaps born of frustration at the lack of recognition – that the narrative of Hackney as 'crap' persists, as well as that the fact

that the changes it is undergoing now might not be seen as positive. He also stakes a claim to authenticity ('the rest of us, everyone else in Hackney') to counter the the critics' attempts to speak for the spirit of the place.

In 2009, such sentiments were expressed more publicly in comments by the elected Mayor of Hackney, Jules Pipe, published with his permission on the *Guardian* journalist Dave Hill's blog about the borough. Pipe's comments were in response to a newspaper article written by the local poet and political activist (and former children's laureate) Michael Rosen, who had criticised the nature of the regeneration of the Dalston area of the borough, and the local authority's role in it. Rosen's piece was subtitled 'Regeneration has become a byword for New Labour's disregard for democracy and slavish devotion to business' (Rosen, 2008a). Pipe countered that Rosen's 'ill-informed stance against the Dalston development is just the latest example of the "Keep Hackney Crap" mentality so beloved of the borough's far left contingent' (quoted in Hill, 2008). In this exchange, the argument was much more clearly about the question of political and economic choices about 'how best to bring prosperity to inner-city neighbourhoods', as Hill pointed out (Hill, 2008). Yet the rhetorical power of affective language, and in particular the label 'Keep Hackney Crap', was unleashed as another way of confronting these debates through the lens of attachment and devotion, as well as through the oppositional framing of nostalgia and progress.

Not long after Pipe's intervention, the iconic 'I Love Hackney' badges became parodied by the independent production of badges bearing the slogan 'Keep Hackney Crap'. Tony Collins, a spokesman for *The Eel* artists' collective producing them suggested that

*The Eel* likes to celebrate that which is forgotten and marginalised. The 'Keep Hackney Crap' campaign is about retaining the things which genuinely make an area unique and loved (quoted in Davies, 2009).

In the same interview, Collins accused Pipe of believing that 'what is currently there is not worth keeping', and countered this with his own statement that 'one person's crap is another person's gold'. In one sense then, this was an echo of the municipal defiance

inherent in the 'I Love Hackney' campaign, or at least Laura's characterisation of it recounted earlier ('I know that you think that this is a dreadful place but believe me it's not and I love it, so there'). It is also a struggle over what it means to 'love' Hackney – keeping an affection for the 'crap', or wanting to improve and change the place in some way.

Though the Mayor suggested the prevalence of the 'far left' in this type of nostalgia, Joe suggested in the earlier interview excerpt that this type of nostalgia comes from political opponents of the local Labour party on the right as well as the left of the political spectrum. Indeed *The Eel's* badge campaign was promoted on the website of Andrew Boff, then prospective Conservative Mayoral candidate for Hackney, who ended his piece noting the campaign with the rhetorical question, 'Isn't it time we had a Mayor who loved Hackney?'.<sup>51</sup> Pipe's accusation that the 'Keep Hackney Crap Brigade' do not love Hackney enough to improve it is turned on him, to suggest that his desire for change shows a lack of love for Hackney (notwithstanding that Boff's own website is called [changehackney.com](http://changehackney.com)).

These public debates quickly become oppositional and simplifying. But in the interview situation, my research created a space in which policy practitioners were able to reflect in more nuanced ways on how to negotiate shared (or contested) narratives of Hackney. As these debates emerged, I expanded that space to include the two figures who had become emblematic of a particular aspect of these arguments, to explore whether there actually was any shared ground within these negotiations.

### ***'Improving for whom?'***

Two writers and Hackney residents, Michael Rosen and Iain Sinclair, were frequently identified by policy practitioners as totems of the campaign to 'Keep Hackney Crap' (as we have already seen). Though often mentioned in the same breath by local policy

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<sup>51</sup> See <http://changehackney.com/?p=148> [last accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2010]

practitioners, and both long-time residents of the borough and well-known figures, the two have rather different positions in the struggles over meaning in Hackney. Iain Sinclair's writing about Hackney is part of his broader body of literary psychogeographical work, much of which focuses on London. Though he often speaks at local cultural events which are sometimes critical of the council, the position he has carved out for himself is as a cultural observer, rather than a political activist. Michael Rosen, on the other hand, has long been active within left-wing politics. The article which embroiled him in the argument with Mayor Pipe outlined above was published in *Socialist Worker*, and he has produced artistic as well as journalist work on political themes and particularly criticising regeneration projects like the model seen in Dalston (e.g. Rosen, 2008b). Though not policy practitioners themselves, through their entanglements with local debates about place and community, the two writers did seem to be influencing the practices of governing the borough. For this reason, I decided to interview them both. This would allow them to reflect on these processes as I had allowed the policy practitioners within and outside the local authority to do, rather than relying on published artefacts for my analysis.

Those working in senior roles in the local public sector were well aware of criticisms that their efforts to improve conditions in the local area were aimed at, or resulted in, a simple displacement of poorer residents by wealthier gentrifiers. The dilemmas of how to improve local quality of life without thereby becoming subject to market processes that produce this demographic change led to evident frustration for many. Local politician Sam argued that those against change were trying to preserve some form of genteel urban chaos for themselves:

Sam: But there is this body of people in the borough who say 'Oh no no! You should leave it as it is', the whole sodding Iain Sinclair nonsense and to my mind it's... deprivation fetishism...

Here Sam refers to the elegiacal tone of Iain Sinclair's writing on Hackney and particularly around changes being made to the Olympic site (e.g. Sinclair, 2008b and 2009). He might be thinking of statements like the following:

There is no sense of regeneration here. Thank god. Not yet. Business as usual. Cornershop steel-shuttered like Belfast and bristling with handwritten warnings to schoolkids. Hooded chemical brokers start young. And finish young too, many of them (Sinclair, 2009:9).

The passion in the narratives of Sinclair and others who claim to be voices of otherwise unheard Hackneys can be taken as nostalgia for a place of dirt and poverty, expressed as an angry polemic against those who would regenerate and clear up the place. The sigh of relief at 'no sense of regeneration here' may refer to some kind of distaste for a cleaning-up seen as antiseptic and inauthentic; but coupling this with an apparent celebration of the 'bristling', 'steel-shuttered' scene of young drug dealers heading for an early grave undermines this romanticism (similarly the drawing on another mythology of place, a conflict-hardened and depressed image of Belfast). This is the reading of many council officers and councillors like Joe and Sam, who feel that Sinclair and other critics are sitting pretty in the 'nicer' parts of Hackney, wanting to preserve the picturesque poverty elsewhere for their own inspiration, without caring about the people who live in the majority of the borough.

A particular row erupted when an invitation for Iain Sinclair to give a pre-publication reading of his 2009 book dedicated to Hackney in a Hackney public library was withdrawn. This of course resulted in an eye-catching hook for his book's publicity (see Sinclair, 2008a). The general tenor of the book (which the local authority had not seen when the invitation was withdrawn) is, like much of his other writing, a self-professed love for the borough in which he has lived for 40 years. But this is an affection tempered with nostalgia, and a distrust of the organisations that govern the borough and the changes in its life and infrastructure (particularly linked to the 2012 Olympic developments). When I interviewed him, I asked Iain Sinclair for his perspective on the way that the 'banning' of his book launch had created publicity for the book itself:

Iain: From my point of view, all of that was absolutely wonderful... what was in a sense a very Old Hackney event... a very small, twenty people in the library



kind of [thing]... that would have been invisible and under the radar is suddenly big and it helps to sell an enormous quantity of books, in a way I couldn't have invented if I'd tried to do something myself [both laugh]... It was an act of branding to have actually got Hackney into the title of the book and a map on the cover, meant that it became a branded artefact of a particular kind of argument which it wasn't even necessarily making, because a lot of it was just to do with uncovering and celebrating and testing mythology of the past.

Sinclair points out that the clash with the local authority was unplanned; he had expected an 'Old Hackney event', of interest only to local history enthusiasts, and yet the local authority's clumsy attempt to avoid being associated with negative publicity for the Olympics had resulted in a national news story. In our conversation, as in much of his writing on the subject, Sinclair places his concern with 'mythology of the past' in opposition to the workings of government, and of the future as imagined through regeneration such as that linked to the 2012 Olympic Games. And here he draws on two types of mythology: that which he is most interested in 'uncovering and celebrating', a nostalgic psychogeography based around Hackney's histories (see also Bonnett, 2009); and that of branding, which made his book, through its associations with Hackney (and its controversies) alone, an 'artefact of a particular kind of argument that I wasn't even necessarily making'. This 'particular kind of argument' is, presumably, the anti-regeneration and anti-gentrification position which many officers and members of the local authority attributed to him. Here, he is arguing that his position is simply that of a cultural commentator exploring mythologies and their articulations in the present.

In Sinclair's dreams of Hackney, the 'unnoticed and unrequired ruin[s]' should be cherished (Sinclair, 2008b). For him, their renovation is a tragedy, profit conquering aesthetics, with Olympic legacy-building as a driving force. Though he might argue that he is defending creativity and urban energy, it is easy to respond that this is self-indulgent in comparison with meeting pressing needs for affordable housing and decent services. But while mourning the loss of 'every previously unnoticed and

unrequired ruin', he also recognises that some of the work of turning them 'to profit' has been done by the 'impoverished artists and free-livers' themselves:

We have waved this disaster through, we have colluded: dozens of artists roam the perimeter fence soliciting Arts Council funding to underwrite their protests. It's so awful, such a visible horror, we can't believe our luck (Sinclair, 2008b).

While Sinclair is nostalgic for the waste and ruin of a haunted landscape, he also recognises that this nostalgia is his subject, and that as it becomes built upon and over-written, the material for his own writing expands. Further, the artists 'protesting' this 'horror' seek and find support for their work on it from the public sector in the form of Arts Council funding. The faceless state at once destroys and preserves the landscape; the protesting artists at once protest and profit from this change. Both are implicated in patterns of regeneration and the gains and losses it can bring, and capitalise in different ways on its ironies.

As an author, Iain Sinclair's main concern is much different from that of local authority officers, politicians, or other policy practitioners. He made this much clear in the interview, when I asked 'how would you do it differently?' and he replied 'You see I wouldn't... if I responded to that then I'm actually putting myself up to be on the Council!'. He added that the local Liberal Democrats had asked him to stand as their candidate at the 2008 mayoral election in Hackney ('they said... would you stand, because we saw you got all this publicity with this book and it doesn't really matter what your political beliefs are'), but he had declined ('I do see this as a real job! It's not just something you do because you can generate some publicity'). This suggests that Sinclair's view of himself is definitively *not* as a policy practitioner, nor would he choose to be one. Nonetheless, he and his work have become embroiled in political negotiations, and one reason for this is that brand and narratives of place leach between municipal campaigns, political movements, cultural artefacts and commercial development; as, perhaps more deliberately, have Michael Rosen's interventions.

Some months after the 'I Love Hackney' campaign was established, the re-opening of

Gillett Square<sup>52</sup> in the Dalston area of Hackney as a renovated urban space was greeted by the elected Mayors of London and Hackney, 200 saxophonists, and an audience for an afternoon of celebratory music and dance. It also attracted a group of protesters with signs declaiming the 'gentricide' or 'regenocide' they felt the new space represented, with its re-paved square and ban on public drinking. Their view was that the square's renovation was a privatisation of public space and another stage in the transfer of wealth and power from poor to rich, and in this process a neutering of some form of authentic Hackney-ness (Ben, 2006).

One response to this view came from Sam, a senior elected politician in the borough, when I asked his views about the effect of rising property prices on Hackney's diversity:

Sam: I don't think it's a gentrification that's pushing out the local working class people... but some of these things with Gillett Square or whatever... push out the grottier element, you know. There was the street drinking that used to go on there, and... people that are there now... want that moved on, understandably.

Sam's response seems to confirm suspicions of anti-regeneration(/gentrification) protesters that the intentions behind Gillett Square and other developments were to move on 'the grottier element', here referring to street drinkers, from public space. But Sam distinguishes this 'element' from 'local working class people', who are seen as regaining access to the urban environment by removing a threatening presence. The protest at the opening of Gillett Square was recalled by several council officers and elected members as typical of privileged gentrifiers wanting to preserve a sense of urban grittiness, at the expense of those without the cultural and economic capital to insulate them from its ill-effects. More than one council officer described to me a group of teenagers telling the protesters that they (the teenagers) were glad that the place was now 'safer, more well-lit'.

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<sup>52</sup> There is no room to go into the complicated history of this development here but see (Hart, 2003) for one insider's account.

Gillett Square is in Dalston, the area of Hackney where poet Michael Rosen lives, and one undergoing rapid change associated in particular with the arrival of a new link to the Tube system, the opening of new cultural and entertainment venues and large-scale housing developments. Michael Rosen has been outspoken about these changes, the subject of his public spat with Mayor Pipe outlined above, and with comments published in *Time Out*:

A demographic dream grew in the heart of the large white building: they could change the way Hackney is... families out, young professionals in. Migrants' shops out, chain stores in. Blink and you'll miss the rising of another block of loft-style apartments... Manhattan... studio... modern living etc..... A train linking Hackney to Croydon is on its way, reminding us that the great white building will preside over the Croydonisation of Dalston and no one really knows what the Olympics will bring (Rosen, 2007).

Here Rosen suggests a sinister Town Hall dream of the displacement of the authentically local ('families', 'migrants' shops') by the blank face of economic capital ('young professionals', 'chain stores'). His reference to the 'large white building' carries echoes of Iain Sinclair's characterisation of Hackney Town Hall as a removed, colonial and quasi-fascist building (Sinclair, 2009:24). Rosen notes the opening of new London Overground stations in Hackney, including a new station in Dalston, fearful of the 'Croydonisation'<sup>53</sup> of what was once the Hackney spirit, ushered in by preparations for the 2012 Olympics, which stand here for an uncertain and threatening future. The over-riding tone is a mistrust of the local state and of a model of regeneration which relies on global, homogenising capital which will 'change the way Hackney is'.

In light of such writings, many councillors I interviewed treated Michael Rosen as a symbol of those standing for a nostalgic, preservationist attitude, wanting to keep a picturesque idea of ramshackle Hackney for themselves. But when I interviewed him,

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<sup>53</sup> For more on the treatment of the outer London suburb of Croydon as an abject elsewhere to the vibrant inner city, see Back (2001). The use of Manhattan and Croydon as adjacent symbols of soulless capitalism (and as contrasting symbols to 'the way Hackney is') deserves further exploration than is possible here.

he criticised such views in very similar terms to them:

Michael: I think people think that they discovered Hackney in 1975 or something and then are really quite cross that people who look like them and sound like them and the same educational background or whatever, have turned up. But no, I don't have that attitude. I don't think that's THE problem.

Here, Rosen alludes to the 'pioneer' gentrifiers who valued Hackney for what they felt to be its exotic edge, some of whom are now characterised as the most vocal opposition to later stages of urban renewal. As more people 'who look like them and sound like them' gain access to Hackney's inner London exoticism, it undermines the rarity and value of the cultural capital they have amassed through an exclusive association with the place. Rosen acknowledges that these attitudes exist, but distances himself from them (again, they are the absent others who define the speaker's position as an authentic Hackney resident). For him, such people are something of a side-show; 'THE problem' is the way in which urban change is progressing within a neoliberal capitalist framework.

Though Rosen has pushed for a greater attention to the preservation of older urban environments in Dalston in particular, he argued that this was not an outright opposition to urban change, but that he favoured more community-led and less capital-intensive development. He contrasted this to the local authority model of reliance on the capital and leverage available within the parameters of local government power and the vagaries of the property market. Rosen went on to describe an altercation with a council official in which their contrasting visions of Hackney collided:

Michael: I said all you've done, is just facilitate very large private capital to bulldoze the centre of Dalston, and create something that nobody has asked for... of course there was immediate resentment from the woman, she said no, no, no, we're improving, and I said improving for whom?... And she said 'look at Kingsland Road... it's a mess, isn't it?'... And I said, it's just people... that's life, it's not a mess, it's just how we live, and I could see that there was

absolute incomprehension, that we were talking two completely different languages.

Rosen's question – 'improving for whom?' – is at the centre of these narratives and counter-narratives. The local authority practitioners I spoke with saw the renovation of Gillett Square as benefiting local young people (those who were reported as being pleased about better lighting, paving and security), albeit relying on elements of private investment and public-private partnership to do so. Michael Rosen (and, we might presume, the 'gentricide' protesters) emphasised the role of 'very large private capital' profiting from something which 'nobody has asked for'. What seems to Sam to be 'deprivation fetishism' aiming to retain poverty as an artistic backdrop, is for Rosen an attempt to protect 'people', 'how we live', from the homogenising and excluding forces of capitalism. Rosen senses that he and the local authority representative he encountered 'were talking two completely different languages'. But I would suggest that the mutual incomprehension is not so clear-cut. While Rosen and others are not championing poverty, nor are the policy practitioners I interviewed uncomplicatedly championing gentrification or free market logics. And people in both 'camps' are aware of, if not comfortable with, the ways that their own fortunes are implicated in the positions they take in these debates.

Sam, the local politician, elaborates on this in relation to another location of contested class meanings, Broadway Market:

Sam: Broadway Market, that's total gentrification, I mean the prices they charge, two quid cupcakes, that kind of thing. But local people actually like the market being there, even if you don't wanna s- can't afford to spend money... you can say 'oh well it's a nice area to live and it's kinda buzzy and it's good'.

Broadway Market is well-recognised as a site of middle class gentrification, with its olive stalls and, as Sam notes, expensive cupcakes and other luxuries (Wright, 2009, p.xiv). It is close to London Fields, the site of the beginnings of Hackney gentrification

as mapped out in Butler and Robson's (2003) study at the turn of the millenium.<sup>54</sup> Broadway Market is ostensibly the result of gentrification by 'collective social action' rather than by 'capital' (a distinction made by Butler and Robson, 2003:26 following Warde, 1991). As such, it is alternately cherished as friendly and positive, and disliked as 'too middle class' and exclusive. Sam's description of 'local people' who 'like the market being there' calls on some imagined, authentically poor local figure, able to enjoy the 'buzz' of the market even if unwilling – or as Sam corrects himself, unable – to partake of its goods.

Note, though, that Sam does suggest (as might seem obvious) that the enjoyment he imagines could be surprising for those economically excluded from participating in the market (they 'actually' like it). Returning to Sam's narrative of the last time he visited Broadway Market uncovers another layer to the complications and ironies of gentrification debates:

Sam: I was dragged to it because [my partner] wanted to buy some fruit and veg  
so we were ripped off £1.50 per aubergine, thought right we're never coming  
back here and actually

Hannah: [laughs]

Sam: then, she said I wish I hadn't bought those and I said why not, and she said  
because this guy selling them had this 'Keep Hackney Crap' badge on.

The irony of Sam's story of the aubergines has several levels. Firstly, as we saw earlier, he was in one context an advocate of the market as a positive development in the area despite the inequalities in access to consumption there. But in this extract, he makes it clear that he himself feels uncomfortable in the market (being 'dragged to it'), possibly because of the divisions it exposes through its high prices and luxury goods. Sam may feel that while material inequalities disadvantage poorer local people, these inequalities also create difficulties for middle class consumers trying to manage a

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<sup>54</sup> Some of the underlying tensions and the gap between 'Hackneys' became more visible than usual in May 2010, when the park's geography as a hangout for picnicking professionals crossed over with its location as a fault line between 'postcode gangs', and an 'innocent bystander' was shot and injured (see BBC News, 2010; Budden, 2010; Lewis, 2010).

liveable sense of self when those inequalities become visible. However, the reason that Sam's partner gave for rejecting the market was not the high price of vegetables, but that the stall-holder had been wearing the reconfigured 'Keep Hackney Crap' badge; the badge reclaiming the jibe against anti-gentrification protests as a form of protest in itself, against the policies of the local authority to which Sam is elected.

Yet the ironies do not stop there. The market trader wearing the 'Keep Hackney Crap' badge was making a living from the very gentrification his badge ironically protested against; it is hard to see in what register Broadway Market as it operates at present could be either dismissed or celebrated as 'crap'. Of course the badge itself celebrates what others deem 'crap' about the borough, but by all accounts this consists of some combination of disorganisation, independence, unruliness, messiness, poverty or danger. Not many of these adjectives could be applied to the 'total gentrification' of Broadway Market, or the selling of aubergines for £1.50 each. Again though, the story is not quite so simple; the currently thriving Broadway Market was built up by independent market traders, and though it is now run in conjunction with the council, which claims it as an official local treasure,<sup>55</sup> the history of conflict with the Council remains important to local mythologies.<sup>56</sup> An active figure in the local traders and residents' association is the former Conservative mayoral candidate, adding a dimension of party politics to the ways the 'Keep Hackney Crap' phrase set off by the Labour Mayor has become used.

However, my interest is not in arbitrating claims about whether the development of Broadway Market, Gillett Square, or any other regeneration initiative was for better or worse. Rather, I focus on how (and why) debates about the future of Hackney, and about processes of regeneration or gentrification, are played out through emotive narratives which call on ideas of authenticity of place and of voice. Such decisions centre on the question of who benefits from either changing the place or conserving it.

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<sup>55</sup> See for instance <http://www.hackney.gov.uk/hackney-the-place-culture.htm> last accessed 26 July 2010.

<sup>56</sup> For instance see <http://hackneypost.co.uk/?p=3713> and <http://broadwaymarket.co.uk/index.php?page=community> (both last accessed 26 July 2010).



This is a difficult subject, because it begins to suggest that there are limits to local influence over market-driven changes to the local area. The way these debates are articulated suggest it is more comfortable for all involved to talk about emotive senses of belonging and authenticity, than to confront these limits. Next, I will explore how these questions of meaning and narrative, and the power to name and control them, can be understood through theories of branding and cultural capital exchange.

### ***Brand and cultural capital***

Throughout these empirical encounters I have encountered the language of branding as a way of thinking about how place and narrative are mobilised by different groups. While many of the participants I encountered might have used this language casually, theories of branding are apt for understanding the dynamics of Hackney's meanings; and particularly for understanding them as a source of cultural capital, and therefore a site of power and struggle.

The marketing literature distinguishes *branding* as a distinct approach to selling a 'product' which is not about a fundamental change in the product or an association with a simple abstract emotion, but attachment to a narrative (Holt and Cameron, 2010). Lury suggests that not only have brands become used as a way of organising the role of emotion in brand relations (between consumer and product), but that the use of brands relies on a shift in which '[i]nstead of a desire to keep up with the Joneses, consumers are believed to be more concerned with finding meaning in their lives' (Lury, 2004:38). Authors vary in the extent to which they acknowledge that such narratives rely on the re-incorporation of existing mythologies. Aronczyk, for example, suggests that re-branding nations (as business products for tourism and investment) relies on creative destruction, 'in which old myths and memories are swept away and new ones instituted in their place' (2007:118). However, evidence from more traditional corporate branding exercises, such as those of the Starbucks coffee store chain or Nike sportswear, suggest that myth and counter-myth depend on and play

against one another for effective communication, notoriety and relevance (Holt and Cameron, 2010; Lury, 2004; Thompson et al, 2006).

The re-appropriation of brand myths can be thought of as a form of trading in cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), where identities or meanings that are otherwise seen as abject become a source of cultural capital for others who are able to adopt appealing aspects of the identity, while avoiding abject connotations (Skeggs, 2005b). Skeggs suggests that the logics and techniques of branding are used in popular culture to commodify the culture and experiences of working class British people, making identification with these 'products' an asset for middle class people, which they can trade on as cultural capital (see also Skeggs, 2004). In the case of Hackney (and other places like it), the power of 'edgy' branding allows a place that is seen as dangerous and uncomfortable to be appropriated by those whose existing economic, cultural and social capital enable them to escape any actual danger, while profiting from association with local myths.

In the data discussed in this chapter, such re-appropriation happens at various levels, in an iterative way. The presentation of Hackney as an exemplar of successful multiculturalism under the slogan 'I Love Hackney' was powerful because of Hackney's prior negative connotations (its 'dramatic, burning past'), and the campaign was reinvigorated in response to being dubbed Britain's 'worst place to live' on national television. Here, the first-order claims to 'Love Hackney' were being made in defiance; claiming an authentic knowledge of Hackney as *not* as bad as had been perceived, and therefore claiming a knowledge of the place which exceeded that of outsiders.

But some residents took exception to this as a potentially disingenuous 'sanitising' of local difference, packaged to appeal to 'the middle class'. Their response, in the form of various re-branded cultural artefacts, was to declare their allegiance to another imagined version of the borough under a defiant slogan 'Keep Hackney Crap'. This second type of claim to 'Love Hackney' (as 'Crap') could be a similar claim to authentic knowledge to that outlined above – it's not crap, or 'one person's crap is another's gold'. But another, more ironic version of this re-appropriation of the Hackney brand is

that by identifying with a place seen by others as dangerous, 'dour' or down-at-heel, people gain a sense of excitement and edginess without actually being exposed to any danger.<sup>57</sup> As Iain Sinclair suggested, simply having 'Hackney' in the title of a book and a map of Hackney on its cover was 'an act of branding' which appealed to a group (or groups) of people who were keen to buy into (one version or another of) Hackney mythology. So the nature of the brand is that it is not straightforwardly controlled. Its draw on associations and emotion make it inherently unstable; 'it retains the margins of indeterminacy, and the activities of consumers can extend these margins' (Lury, 2004:162). In branding Hackney, the 'consumers' are residents, activists and others with claims to the place. While other studies of place-branding have demonstrated the risk of a homogenising effect of place-branding in a global market where every place vies to be 'unique' and 'vibrant' (for discussions of which see Aronczyk, 2007:119; Evans, 2006:203; Philo and Kearns, 1993:3), the questions raised in my empirical material have focused more on the competing claims to local authenticity made by a range of voices for a range of purposes.

Philo and Kearns pose a confrontation between accounts of place and history produced '*in the name of* an urban-based bourgeoisie', and those '*in the name of* those "other peoples" of the city' (Philo and Kearns, 1993:26, my emphasis). Their assumption is that these groups speak for themselves, and are in competition, so that the stories of 'other peoples' are always silenced. But all of the accounts I have provided here are accounts made *in the name of* 'other peoples' (in Philo and Kearns' terms) *by* middle-class urbanites. Philo and Kearns' model can only really work when histories of the working classes, women, ethnic others, sexual minorities, disabled people and other marginalised groups are seen as uninteresting, irrelevant or threatening by those with greater power to command narratives of place. In the time, place and context where my research was conducted, this is not the case. Such stories are in fact the *most* interesting; their appeal lying precisely in an association with authenticity and the

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<sup>57</sup> See for example [www.houseofhackney.com](http://www.houseofhackney.com), 'the luxe wallpaper, bed linen and home furnishings brand which reworks traditional British homewares for a new generation'. Their 'Hackney Empire' design features sloths smoking shishas and raccoons downing bottles of tequila, and adorns teacups sold for £68 each and wallpaper at £148 per roll.

concern of consumers to find meaning in their lives identified by Lury (2004:38) as at the heart of branding strategies (see also Chapter Seven). The people I have quoted speak *in the name of* marginalised others, but also in the name of *solidarity with* those marginalised others. For example, let's remind ourselves of two such claims, the first from local politician Joe, the second from Michael Rosen:

Joe: ... you get to live in Albion Square, and the rest of us, and everyone else in Hackney, we should just keep it as nasty as possible so you get to feel really cool about it and write some edgy articles for the Guardian?...

Michael: ... all you've done, is just facilitate very large private capital to bulldoze the centre of Dalston, and create something that nobody has asked for...

Both of these interviewees make a claim to be part of Hackney's (authentic) community, and to be defending either this community's future (in the first quote) or its past (in the second). They both position themselves as mounting this defence against threats from more powerful others (in the first case, artists and writers, in the second, property developers) who they position in turn as trying to profit from the cultural capital of Hackney (firstly by living in a rich area of Hackney while feeling 'really cool' about the surrounding poverty; secondly by bulldozing Dalston to attract new residents who will push out existing ones). The claims to authentic knowledge of and solidarity with 'Hackney' which both speakers make are based on their existing stocks of cultural capital rooted in local their own local histories and associations.

As the 'Keep Hackney Crap' badges, the artists who 'can't believe their luck' at 'such visible horror' of urban development, and the people who 'think they discovered Hackney in 1975' show, one aspect of the attachment to Hackney is to seek to protect the cultural capital it accrues by keeping this capital scarce. That is, something is only 'edgy' as long as most people still despise it (and the edgy people remain ahead of the crowd). Such a logic has been identified in more straightforward analyses of trends and marketing (e.g. Thompson et al, 2006), but differs from the more general findings of studies such as Butler (1997), Butler and Robson (2003), May (1996) and Reay (2008)

which uncovered a more explicit desire to enjoy observing 'otherness' whilst maintaining a definite distance from it.<sup>58</sup>

The difficulty is that so many of these claims to Hackney and its myths are rooted in claims of certainty; certainty of being right and of others being wrong. Even complexity and flux become reified by appeals to 'diversity', or claims that Hackney has 'always been a place of change'. The success of London's bid to host the 2012 Olympic Games is widely attributed to its foregrounding of the internationalism and multiculturalism of east London (Vertovec 2007:1025; Wetherell, 2008:306-7). One of the central motivations for making the bid was to attract funding to this deprived area of the city (Evening Standard, 2008).

The local politicians and officers might benefit by 'improving' the place – in their careers and reputation as well as their community-minded goals. And the artists make (and recognise that they make) a good deal out of it too, as noted by Iain Sinclair above. Academics (including myself!), are of course no less exempt from this, with Hackney's potency as an area of diversity and change, inequality and political history (and often personal associations) drawing a variety of scholars to produce studies embedded in the area (e.g. Aldred and Jungnickel, 2010/1; Andersson, 2009; Butler, 1997; Butler and Robson, 2003; Manzi and Jacobs, 2009; Markova and Black, 2007; May, 1996; Mumford and Power, 2003; Pratt, 2009; Sinclair, 2009; Rhys-Taylor, 2010; Watson, 2009; Wessendorf, 2010; Wright, 2009; Young et al, 1980). The logics of audit and associated cultural and eventually economic capital apply to academic outputs as much as to those of local authority employees (Back, 2008). There are no easy answers about which narrative is 'most progressive'; and this is complicated further, as the narrators themselves recognise – to different extents – their own privileged positions in negotiating and using Hackney's brand.

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<sup>58</sup> Though of course my study differs markedly from that of these earlier researchers, who focused on middle class residents in general, rather than policy practitioners and public figures.

## ***Conclusions***

Place branding has received attention within studies of regeneration, geography and sociology, but this writing has largely focused on the promotion of places to potential investors and tourists (e.g. Aronczyk, 2007; Evans, 2006:197; Kearns and Philo, 1993; Urry, 1995; Ward, 1998). While branding and marketing are often criticised as vacuous and illusory (Moloney, 2006:1), within the quasi-market of government performance measures, having a reputation as an efficient and effective local authority can be a vital prerequisite for addressing more material issues, such as inequalities of power and wealth (see Chapters One and Six). As we have seen in this chapter, an important aspect of a place's brand is not just the reputation of local institutions, but the 'feel' and 'experience' of the place as understood by local residents.

This chapter has explored different ways that the meaning of Hackney has been negotiated in policy practice. I have suggested that a useful way of understanding these negotiations is through the logics of branding, and especially through the indeterminacy and slippage of meaning which branding evokes. Such a perspective is helpful in thinking through how meanings and myths (in this case in relation to place) are used (and rebelled against), in policy as elsewhere, as sources of cultural capital. I have also begun to suggest that while there is much recognition among policy practitioners that experiences and narratives of Hackney are multiple, there are nevertheless attempts to claim an authentic knowledge, with such claims often made in relation to imagined futures or pasts anchored within place (and in opposition to other places and times). In these negotiations, attempts to construct narratives of Hackney as a place of community cohesion face difficulties when it becomes apparent that strong claims to love Hackney as a place and a community are multiple, emotive – and conflicting. With closer analysis, it becomes clear that the apparently competing narratives are all attempts to understand local power (or lack of it) to determine Hackney's future. Much of this narrative is constructed around figures who were often spoken about but never revealed themselves to me in my research – either the authentic, marginalised Hackney resident (with whom many claimed to speak in solidarity), or the unreflexive and unsympathetic gentrifier lacking in respect for the

more 'authentic' residents.

Where this chapter has explored the understandings of one place negotiated locally, the next chapter considers the importance of place-brand (or reputation) within the quasi-markets of local governance which I outlined in Chapter One. The navigation of cohesion policy with reference to symbolic places which I suggested in Chapter Three is considered from the point of view of the policy practitioners negotiating those meanings from within, and I consider how the logics of branding and positioning are mobilised by different places competing *against* one another. This is another approach again to the competition for private investment or tourists which most place-branding literature addresses; the market in which place-brands compete in Chapter Six is primarily that of competition for government funding and recognition of success within auditing regimes.

## Chapter Six: 'We spent a lot of time trying to be known for other things'

### *Introduction*

In this chapter, I focus less on how meanings of place relate to local residents, and more on the relationship to national understandings of how local government copes with living together with difference in contemporary Britain. The places I will discuss were used repeatedly in my research encounters to stand for differently dysfunctional examples of community cohesion problems. I will discuss the differences and parallels in how policy practitioners in these 'other places' try to overcome and capitalise on the places' problematic pasts. In developing an element of my research within each of these areas, I explore how local policy practitioners react to and play with these understandings, with echoes of the branding and re-branding approaches discussed in the previous chapter. I suggest that these approaches to managing narratives are shaped by frameworks of local and national government auditing and competition.

As I argued in Chapter Three, certain places have taken on metonymic significance in narratives about community cohesion. In Chapter One, I discussed how technologies of governmentality frame policy and decision-making within common sense narratives based around competitive performance measurement. In this chapter, I explore *how* places become imagined within policy structures. Local policy practitioners are concerned to present a positive image of the place they represent (politically or professionally) because they perceive that its material conditions, as well as perhaps their own careers, are mediated primarily through presentation and reputation. So this chapter, like the rest of the thesis, is dedicated to understanding the metaphors which policy practitioners use to make sense of, and work within, reality. These metaphors are important not because they *capture* 'reality'; and not because they *disguise* reality. They are important because they are 'a means through which reality is rendered comprehensible' (Keith, 2005:70); they are tools which policy practitioners use to negotiate difficult subjects.



To remind ourselves of how narratives of 'other places' were used to demonstrate a relative lack of urgency of community cohesion policy in Hackney, here is an extract from one of the first interviews I conducted, with Mark, an Assistant Director there:

Mark: But it [community cohesion] doesn't... seem to me to be a big issue. Now I've no doubt that in the Peterboroughs of this world... they sit in the pubs and they worry about all these East Europeans flooding in, picking all our tomatoes or carrots or whatever, or in Dagenham, they think that this is the final straw, Ford closes down, or nearly closes down, and nobody cares about us, and now they're dumping all these foreigners on us, and so on and so forth... but I think that that's an atypical perspective for London. Now I've no idea whether it's appropriate for Oldham, clearly where there's a very different geographical mix of the ethnic groups kind of thing. And, yeah, you go to Bradford, you think, oh gosh, that's – this is – you know, it's quite different really!

Hannah: Yeah [both laugh]

Mark: [laughs] I can see why the Asians don't wanna live on some of the estates there...

This striking extract sums up 'the Peterboroughs of this world' as places scared by the newness of Eastern European migration and fearful for their agricultural jobs; (Barking and) Dagenham as a de-industrialised wasteland whose residents feel neglected by the state and society and resort to scapegoating 'foreigners'; and Oldham and Bradford, whose 'geographical mix of the ethnic groups' does not even need to be elaborated to provoke a sardonic laugh of recognition from me about the segregated nature of their 'parallel lives'. As discussed in Chapter Three, a similar strategy of understanding 'types' of community cohesion in relation to place was adopted by the national Commission on Integration and Cohesion, which produced a set of archetypal descriptions rather than referring directly to empirical places as representative of particular problems (COIC, 2007:58).

As will become clear throughout the chapter, the three places to which I followed these narratives do not map universally onto the imagined geographies of cohesion. That is

to say, for example, that Bradford was used as a reference to parallel lives and riots at least as often as Oldham; indeed, sometimes places which had not had civil disturbances in 2001 but whose name sounded similar (e.g. Blackburn) were referred to in this way by interviewees. And as noted in Chapter Three, the association of Peterborough with community cohesion narratives was not as strong as for Barking and Dagenham or Oldham. Yet, consistently, all of these places *were* used as reference points for demonstrating shared knowledge of failures of cohesion and integration. And as I will show in this chapter, policy practitioners in each of these places recognised that such associations were operating at a national level, and thought it important to address the negative associations this entailed.

The chapter considers each of the three 'other places' in turn. For each, I explore how 'outside' policy practitioners constructed and used the idea of the place to negotiate their own understandings of community cohesion policy. I then discuss how local policy practitioners reflected on these outsiders' views, made claims to more authentic knowledge, and re-framed the essentials of the broader narrative within more detailed narratives of local complexity. Finally, for each place I discuss how policy practitioners moved from arguing with what they saw as inaccurate representations of their place, to describing how they had actively manipulated these meanings to re-brand their locality and their local authority. These attempts to appropriate an existing negative meaning and use it to promote a place has a similar logic to the re-branding of Hackney which I discussed in Chapter Five. In this chapter, however, policy practitioners were looking beyond local affect and belonging and the control of local narratives, and trying to establish a positive reputation for community cohesion policy among other policy practitioners.

## ***'Oldham? Riot town!'***

### *Approaching Oldham*

Erin: [We said] we need some funding from government to deal with this before we have a Oldham and Bradford riot.

Andrew: We would have had another Bradford riot if we hadn't have done this community cohesion work.

Siv: Like in Oldham... you know, when they had the riots... people didn't even go to school together, the kids in the different areas in Oldham didn't even know, that it was a no-go area and you start getting that apartheid.

These interview extracts are examples of how Erin (speaking from Peterborough), Andrew (in Barking and Dagenham) and Siv (in Hackney) used Oldham and associated places metonymically to stand for riots and parallel lives – and experiences far removed from their own. These examples arose within interviewees' narratives without prompting, clearly linking Oldham (and Bradford) to 'riots' or 'apartheid'. Once I had established my fieldwork sites, I explained the design of my research at the outset of each interview, and some of the resulting exchanges shed light on how implicit the meaning of Oldham had become:

Hannah: ... part of the story of what cohesion means to people, so they were Oldham, Peterborough and Barking and Dagenham.

Sally: [overlapping] Oh right I wonder why! [laughs]

Hannah: [overlapping] For different reasons. [laughs]

Hannah: When people talk about cohesion there's certain places that come up,

Mike: [overlapping] Right.

Hannah: [overlapping] in the story and Oldham,

Mike: Oldham is obviously, yeah.

Sally, who works in the voluntary sector in Hackney, and Mike, an interfaith leader in

Oldham were both unsurprised that the fieldwork sites I had chosen were being treated as of particular significance to community cohesion policy. More strikingly, neither I nor they felt the need to establish what this significance might be; the meanings have simply become 'common sense'. As discussed in Chapter Three, these associations stem from the violent disturbances of 2001 in those towns, to which government reports prescribed 'community cohesion' as a cure. Oldham (with other 'northern towns') has taken on a resonance which fixes it in time as a place of riots and ethnic segregation. Interviewees spontaneously referred to the 'problems of Oldham' without feeling the need to elaborate on what they meant by this. Those working within Oldham recognised the image they had, were frustrated by it, and suggested alternative narratives for understanding the town and its history.

Jim was a councillor in Oldham, and described his experience:

Jim: People that come from Oldham, after the riots, wouldn't say they come from Oldham, they'd shy away, you know... come from near Manchester and things like that... and people used to say... where do you come from, I said Oldham, Oldham? Riot town! Well yeah, but – there's been a riot in Birmingham after, why don't you ever remember that one?...

Hannah: And why do you think that one's not remembered as much?

Jim: Well, it's the national news, Oldham was great, weren't it, cos Asians were setting fire to cars, it made good news, you know... but I think we've got away from that now, nobody ever says it to me now... Now and again it creeps up... when I go to meetings about cohesion... Where do you come from... Oldham, and... half a dozen people said, oh, riot town!

Hannah: [laughs]

Jim: You know, other councillors, I said, No!... Not the riot town! The best borough in the country for cohesion!

Jim is clear here that the reputation of Oldham as a 'riot town' has been pervasive, to the extent that he believed many Oldhamers had become unwilling to identify themselves as local because of the negative response they expected this to elicit from other people. Jim's view expressed here is that though this has lessened somewhat

among the general public, the association of Oldham with telegenic images of riots remains strong in local government circles. Jim notes how 'Asians setting fire to cars' makes 'good news', and such images of course are not only dramatic in themselves, but draw on resonances with the past, such as the urban riots in the 1980s and all of their political associations (see Chapter Three). Jim suggests these images made Oldham's disturbances more resonant in imagined geographies than the 'riot in Birmingham after'. Jim is referring to disturbances that took place in Birmingham in 2005 and were characterised by the media as being clashes between Pakistani and African-Caribbean groups arising as a result of revenge attacks for a rumoured gang rape (Muir and Butt, 2005).<sup>59</sup> Though it can only be speculation on my part, the difficulty of fitting the Birmingham situation into the existing narratives of migration, integration and cohesion (or their lack) may have contributed to this story not developing as a policy parable in the way that those connected with Oldham have (Bourdieu, 1977[1972]:170; Trouillot, 1995:82).

### *Inside Oldham*

Anne: And I got quite fired up and said do you not think that we know that we had disturbances in Oldham in 2001, and do you not think that we've been doing something about it since?... Do you not know that we've had so many weekends since then... where we haven't actually had disturbances in Oldham... and Ted Cantle actually said then, Oldham was unlucky... It was a series of events that happened on that afternoon... fuelled by known BNP members, and it happened in Oldham, but he said it could have happened in any of the northern towns with similar ethnic compositions.

In this extract from my conversation with Anne (a former Oldham councillor) she describes an encounter at a national conference where a colleague had 'wanted it all

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<sup>59</sup> Of course, Birmingham is still remembered for riots in the Handsworth area of the city in 1981, but Jim is here referring to an incident since 2001. Newspapers also reported rioting in Birmingham following clashes between the far-right English Defence League and the anti-racist Unite Against Fascism in August 2009, but my interview with Jim took place the previous June.

to be about the riots in Oldham, and not progress that had happened since'. In this case, she had had the opportunity to disagree with him, and had been supported by Ted Cante (who since he conducted the national report on community cohesion is often presented as a 'community cohesion guru'). Anne's argument here is not just that Oldham was unlucky, but also that people in Oldham have 'been doing something about it since'. Like Jim, she expressed frustration at the association of Oldham with riotousness, and linked it to media coverage:

Anne: I think there's a frustration with the national press in that every time Oldham's on the telly you've got the blazing police car. The blazing police van, it was just a prerequisite and it's just short hand isn't it, it's journalistic shorthand, and the number of times where whenever people mention Oldham they talk about those events, I think the other thing that I was constantly battling off was the question about the BNP.

Anne, like Jim, described being constantly made aware of Oldham's reputation outside the borough as a 'riot town', by media reliance on images of Oldham and 'the blazing police car'. Anne then notes another way in which Oldham's reputation has spread. She is not only expected to talk about problems with community cohesion at conferences, but also to dispense advice on how to deal with similar problems. And the expertise that is sought is not necessarily in areas that Anne feels are particularly relevant to Oldham's circumstances. Though she suggests that the 2001 disturbances were 'fuelled by known BNP members', Anne denies that the BNP have been a significant presence in Oldham; mainstream parties had confronted them and they had not been elected to the council. She seems angry that, nevertheless, there is an 'assumption that we must have had a handful of BNP councillors', leading representatives of Barking and Dagenham to ask Oldham for advice after electing 12 BNP councillors in 2006. Anne is adamant that Oldham's reputation for riots should not seep into an assumption that the borough has a racist voting record. Thus even where Oldham's association with community cohesion is as a source of good practice, Anne has reservations. Claims to know how to deal with problems can result in a continued association between the area and those problems.

A number of policy practitioners in Oldham argued that whilst it was true that there had been disturbances in 2001, the national narratives that stemmed from these were distorted. They provided more nuanced narratives, based on claims to authentic local knowledge. For example, Rafiq, who now worked for an inter-faith organisation in Oldham, described his personal experiences on the night of the disorder:

Rafiq: Riots in Oldham and as serious as they were... were very very localised... I know that because I was driving my taxi that night... and I was all around Oldham... it was very very localised... this is the physical act of rioting... there were bad feelings among people but it was, I feel, localised and whenever a news story is put out by news organisations... there's this sense of *déjà vu*, that, we all say, here we go again! [both laugh]

Here, Rafiq demonstrates his awareness of Oldham as an empirical place and as a metaphor. He acknowledges that the rioting was serious, but states his own physical presence in the town (indeed, driving around different parts of the town) as evidence of his authority to speak on the subject. Despite this, Rafiq suggests that the *narratives* of the riots, as opposed to the physical acts that took place, are important to the area. They have become commonplace in news coverage of Oldham, 'whenever a news story is put out... here we go again!'. This suggests that what *actually* took place on the nights of the riots is less important than the aftermath in terms of how Oldham is treated by both insiders and outsiders.

Jim's position, on the other hand, was to state very definitely that the disturbances were wholly the result of rivalries between drug dealers. This was an explanation I did not hear from anyone else, although there were fleeting references to drugs in all three of the Cattle (2001:40), Denham (2001:11) and Ritchie (2001:12-13) reports into the disturbances. Jim went much further, however, suggesting that the drug trade in itself was the root cause of the violence:

Jim: Everybody says that Glodwick, the Pakistani area, is a no go area and... it's not

particularly the Asians, or the BME that are making it a no go area, it's the drug [pause] lords, if you like... making it into a no go area, cos they don't want the police down there!... What they do want is white people going in that use drugs... to buy 'em off 'em, and that's part of what all that rioting were about. You know, a lot of it started off with a drugs war. Really. And people don't agree with me on that, but... I'm different as a cabinet member, I'm a blue collar worker... you start listening to people and that's what's going on, a lot of it's drug related.

Though he continued to talk about 'the Asians, or the BME' and 'white people' as distinct groups throughout the interview, Jim insisted that problems were not linked to racialised inequalities or tensions. His alternative explanation was that many of Oldham's problems stemmed from the drugs trade; 'nothing to do with race or anything else, it's just thuggery'. Jim suggested he had access to privileged knowledge as a working class councillor whose day job brought him into contact with many locals across Oldham. Jim's underlying argument seems to be that those council officers, national commissions and others who had concluded that tensions in Oldham were inflected by race and racism and associated with structural issues of social and economic inequality had missed the 'common-sense' problem of local criminal rivalries.

Steve, who worked for a race equality organisation in Oldham, also challenged the local and national consensus, but from a different position and in a different, even contradictory way. His view was that Oldham suffered from more long term tensions, and that the 'progress' that Anne and most of the other local respondents described was more a matter of presentation than substance. He described another violent scene which had taken place in Oldham more recently than 2001, in a local school:

Steve: When I talk to young people about what it's like at their schools... what came back to me was, in unsupervised times of the day, they're in racially defined groups. And one or two will let on to one another, but the rest of the time they're in racially defined groups and, and every so often, that breaks out into fighting. Most notoriously in 2005 at St Augustine's school here,



which I found, in 2007... THAT, far more than the riots of 2001, affected young people in this town... because it was a horrific experience... that has had an enormous effect on the thinking of young people in this town... but it was covered up!

Steve's claim to privileged knowledge, like Jim's, came from conversations with groups not usually seen as included in the meaning-making of Oldham – in this case young people rather than Jim's case of blue-collar workers or council tenants. Steve also challenged the established narrative, but unlike Jim or any of the other policy practitioners I spoke with in Oldham, he did not do so in a way that emphasised positive changes or progress. Indeed, Steve's account seems to suggest that the national image of Oldham as a place of division, segregation and explosive violence may not be so inaccurate. Jim's account of the events at St Augustine's school in 2005 framed that conflict very differently:

Jim: You do have pockets, and it's little gangs of Asians against little gangs of white lads, you know, but, usually sorts itself out... within the school... We've had one thing that didn't, and... again, the press got hold of it and blew it up to summat that it wasn't.

Hannah: Right. Was that – oh that – was that a big – fight in the school,

Jim: [overlapping] Yeah

Hannah: [overlapping] someone was talking to me about that,

Jim: But it, it really wasn't what it was portrayed to be, when you start talking to the people that were involved, the teachers, and I have done, and the headmaster, they didn't see it as being any more than what's happened before, that... never got out, there were one lad hurt, but they've had other kids hurt... before and that, and that's happened for donkey's years, before there were any community cohesion issues, where you had fights in school... that happens, it's part of growing up.

As in his earlier comments, Jim dismisses racialised rivalries as insignificant, and blown out of proportion by the press. The fighting at the school which Steve described to me in graphic terms, Jim describes as just 'part of growing up'. Like his reference to market

logics of drug dealing as at the heart of the problems in 2001, Jim's argument is that outbreaks of violence in Oldham are few, and when they do occur are nothing dramatic or different from anywhere else. For Steve, the treatment of such incidents as mundane was a problem in itself, ignoring tensions that did exist in favour of demonstrating cohesion. Interestingly, both Steve and Jim claimed that their personal and professional familiarity with local circumstances had allowed them to know the *real* dynamics of community cohesion in Oldham, the realities which were distorted by a sensationalist press (from Jim's perspective) or complacent local politicians (from Steve's). Part of their difference in perspective might be explained by the different roles and responsibilities the two men had. As a race equality campaigner it was Steve's role and instinct to highlight problems and tensions (with a view to their remedy), while Jim, as a leading councillor, and others I spoke to were more likely to be professionally recognised for their ability either to ease these problems or to suggest that they had been eased.

Even more prevalent was an attempt to turn the focus away from those events altogether, and to create narratives about Oldham that presented it instead as a leader in the field of community cohesion, or attempted to step outside the cohesion framework and to suggest that the town had moved beyond its dominance.

*Rebranding: 'Best borough in the country for cohesion!'*

Glen: If we had a repeat of the disturbances it would be absolutely catastrophic for Oldham... we know the damage it did to the reputation, our reputation in 2001... if you talk to the average person in Britain now, what do you know about Oldham, an awful lot of people say oh yeah, didn't they have riots in 2001... we're not famous for lots of other things, and so we need to re-brand ourselves... we want to promote ourselves as a university town, that's our new corporate plan, that's one of the things we want to be known for... we don't want to be remembered as the place that had riots.

Glen was a senior local authority officer in Oldham. His reference to 're-branding' was

not just casual; the local authority had, at the time of my visits, recently undertaken a full corporate branding exercise using high resolution images of different positive faces, buildings and landscapes of Oldham alongside a new logo and the slogan 'One Oldham'.<sup>60</sup> A screensaver on this theme played on Glen's computer behind him throughout our meeting. This branding played on an interest in local pride and local residents' 'sense of place' which has become important in local government policy and closely connected to community cohesion. Yet most of the responses to my question about how national views of Oldham had affected the interviewees' work did not focus directly on the immediate impact or feelings of local residents for the place. Rather they were concerned with outsiders' images of the place.

The corporate policy of both the local authority and its partners attempted to provide alternative narratives of the 2001 disturbances and to re-focus attention on other aspects of Oldham. This appears to have begun soon after the riots, when Oldham speakers spent a lot of time promoting their work nationally, as Steve rather cynically describes it here:

Steve: A lot of paper evidence was accumulated and sent down to London... in order to show that Oldham was really doing things, and Oldham speakers were encouraged to go around the country... [the local authority] Chief Exec... used to go and speak, he was asked to speak because he came from Oldham... He wasn't able to reel off a lot of initiatives that had happened in Oldham but he very successfully gave the impression that Oldham was in the forefront of dealing with community cohesion.

Steve clearly felt that much of the work to change perceptions of Oldham was carried out in the world of image management. The strategy of sending speakers to national cohesion events continued at the time of the research; I had initially made contact with Oldham interviewees through meeting an Assistant Director of the local authority at a local government event in London, where he and another colleague I would eventually interview were presenting on good practice for working with faith groups. Jim's

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<sup>60</sup> Details of the full branding exercise were made available online at <http://www.oneoldham.com/> [last accessed 24<sup>th</sup> February 2010].

comment quoted earlier that Oldham was 'not the riot town' but 'the best borough in the country for cohesion!' also highlighted how Oldham had turned national interest in their cohesion problems into a marketing virtue: Oldham as a place with more experience of thinking about community cohesion than most, and hence a place to seek good practice.

Yet several interviewees described a shift in this strategy (linked to a change in chief executive) towards promoting aspects of good practice besides work on community cohesion, because even talking about community cohesion continued to raise the spectre of the troubled past. For example:

Ron: What I don't think we should be is a one trick pony... because if that's the only thing that we can talk about, well bloody hell we can't be doing a very good job, can we? That should be just one good component of the stuff that we're doing... and the stuff that we're talking about. And for a long time unfortunately, we were only famous for that... Now we're famous for some other stuff, and that's important.

Ron, a senior officer at Oldham Council, puts his emphasis on what Oldham is known for, at least as much as what it does. He suggests that promotion of good cohesion practice has run its course as an effective strategy for creating a positive image of Oldham; Oldham should normalise its image by talking about issues other than cohesion. Though Ron says here that Oldham is now 'famous for some other stuff', it's not clear what this is. He does cite positive aspects of Oldham that he suggests could be promoted:

Ron: If you're gonna show Oldham, why not show a picture of Robert Winston?<sup>61</sup> ...  
That's every bit as much Oldham, you know, or our fantastic countryside.

Yet, as Ron says, images of prominent local figures or the surrounding National Park

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<sup>61</sup> Robert Winston is a prominent scientist, but has no connection with Oldham that I know or can find. Ron may have meant to refer to Winston Churchill, the wartime Prime Minister who was MP for Oldham between 1900 and 1906.

and countryside are *not* regularly used in the media when talking about Oldham. His comments suggest that while these positive images exist and are 'every bit as much Oldham', they are not so in the national imagination.

I will argue that this concern, and the attempts to change the image of the town, were in large part driven by the importance of presentation and reputation in the structures of government, particularly the interface between local and national government in the UK, and the importance of narratives of place as a tool for local government. I will elaborate on how this is relevant to interviewees' attempts at removing Oldham's negative associations and producing different, usually more positive, narratives of the town (and local authority) and its 'improvement' in the final section of this chapter. First, I want to examine the place that Barking and Dagenham and then Peterborough take up in narratives of community cohesion policy, and the ways this is reflected on and refracted by local policy practitioners.

### ***Barking and Dagenham: 'the BNP council'***

#### *Approaching Barking and Dagenham*

Owen: Well, there's obviously racism. And Barking and Dagenham shows that. In a way I think that actually... in a place like Hackney well again there will be racism, but it's nowhere near like it is in other communities.

Sam: Obviously you know, you just go in Barking and Dagenham and that [housing]'s gonna be THE election issue... come next May, that people are moving in and taking... our birthrights to housing... in the local area. I mean it's funny that you know they're what ten miles up the road, here in Hackney, it just doesn't feature.

Saida: Far right, it's not an issue so much in Hackney... from intelligence and what we can see... [don't] really get a lot of far right kind of issues coming in... so, it

might be an issue somewhere like in Barking and Dagenham.

All three of the extracts above come from interviews with policy practitioners based in Hackney, and there were many more examples of this use of the contrast with Barking and Dagenham to represent Hackney's success at living together with difference. The immediate association was between Barking and Dagenham and the BNP, with the association so notorious that it often did not need to be spelt out beyond a reference to 'a place like Barking and Dagenham'. Barking and Dagenham and the BNP were synonyms for an alienated, marginalised and therefore racist 'white working class'. Sometimes interviewees related this to issues such as declining manufacturing or shortages of public housing. But in most cases it was a simple shorthand for a racist place that demonstrated how people in the speaker's locality were much more comfortable with contemporary difference and complexity.

In the quotation which opened this chapter, Mark referred to 'Dagenham', where 'they think that this is the final straw, Ford closes down... and nobody cares about us, and now they're dumping all these foreigners on us'. The story of Barking and Dagenham which is most often told is of a 'traditional white working class' community which had relied rather heavily on the state and large paternalistic institutions such as the Ford car plant. Complacency among politicians on a traditionally solidly Labour council, coupled with industrial decline and new residents moving into the borough as overspill from the inner London housing market, are seen as leading to rapid change which has overwhelmed long-standing residents. Much resentment for these changes is targeted at growing numbers of ethnic minority residents, with a great deal of myths, misinformation and resentment circulated about 'their' presence and the support 'they' receive from the state. The connection between this resentment and the election of 12 right-wing fascist British National Party councillors to the local authority in 2006 is the 'perspective' that Mark is referring to in the full quote as 'atypical for London'. It is clear from many of my interviews, and from national press coverage and policy literature (e.g. Wynne-Jones, 2010; Chappell et al, 2010:3) that the BNP and Barking and Dagenham have become closely entwined in the popular imagination. This rhetorical move did not only come from Hackney; as we saw in the discussion of

Oldham above, both Anne and Steve described an incident where the borough of Barking and Dagenham had asked for advice from Oldham on how to deal with BNP electoral success. Though Anne and Steve's attitudes to this approach were different, both presented narratives to me that emphasised the difference between the two authorities in that Oldham, while targeted by the BNP, had never elected one of their members to the local authority.<sup>62</sup>

A different perspective emerged in the following comment from Ed, a national think tank researcher:

Ed: But clearly... if the BNP's winning 12 seats on Barking on Dagenham council, may win more... may win a seat in the European Parliament... that's not a very good... sign about the health of good relations in Britain.

Here, Ed makes a similar move to that discussed above of equating the borough with the presence of the BNP. Though Barking and Dagenham had the most elected BNP representatives of any local authority in the country, it is by no means the only place where they have been elected.<sup>63</sup> The association between the place and the party is so strong that the place has become a national symbol of disharmony, at least for Ed. The locally based policy practitioners I spoke with who associated the place with racism and the BNP used it to illustrate the differences from their own locality. Ed, on the other hand, suggested this was potentially the future for Britain as a whole.

### *Inside Barking and Dagenham*

Phil: I'd say one of the issues here is, cos of the speed of change, there's a sense of grief... There's definitely a sense of grief. You can see the sort of grief curve

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<sup>62</sup> Although between my interviews with Anne and Steve, the BNP did gain the North West of England seat for the European Parliament, which includes Oldham in its boundaries.

<sup>63</sup> In addition to two seats in the European Parliament and one on the Greater London Authority, the BNP has managed to elect councillors including in Blackburn, Bradford, Burnley, Calderdale, Kirklees, Sandwell, and Stoke.

really, denial, anger. Fear and then – all those sorts of things, which people have gone through because of the change. And it's happened so quickly. And when you talk to people they hanker after this [pause] past which frankly didn't really exist, but all imagined with rose tinted spectacles, everyone playing happily in their garden, sticking out there with their doors open and all the rest of it... which as I say didn't really exist, but it is very much this backward look, something that's been lost.

As in Oldham, the outsiders' narrative is not necessarily disputed head-on. Policy practitioners in Barking and Dagenham have engaged especially with the explanatory elements of a broad narrative of post-industrial decline leading to exclusion and resentment. They try to differentiate Barking and Dagenham from its national associations by arguing that support for the BNP might be a symptom of this malaise, but is not as significant for the borough as it has been made out to be.

In the quote above, Phil, a senior local authority officer in Barking and Dagenham, engages with this pervasive narrative of loss. He suggests that the local population is mourning a golden age – even if this golden age 'didn't really exist'. When Phil refers to 'change' here, it is in the context of discussing the changing ethnic composition of the borough. He had talked about nearby Redbridge changing from 'a very white traditional sort of place, to a predominantly Asian borough' over the course of twenty years, but suggested that the challenges in Barking and Dagenham were different particularly because the change in population there was much faster. Phil related this population change to a sense of grief, of mourning attributed to a long-established white (and implicitly working class) community. Phil describes local reactions in therapeutic terms ('the grief curve'), with anger as a natural emotion to be worked through, and perhaps associated with the violence of far right politics. Phil takes these emotions seriously, even as he argues that the idyllic past which is being mourned didn't exist in the terms it is remembered. This is not to say that changes in the economy, family structures and local area have not occurred, but Phil's point is that these changes, and changes in the ethnic make-up of the local population, have become associated by some with the loss of an idealised past which was entirely



without strife.

June, another senior local authority officer in Barking and Dagenham, continued in a similar vein. Her account couples structural and material changes related to housing and employment with a sense of mourning for the past which she considers 'particularly marked' in Barking and Dagenham:

June: As society changed, and as Right to Buy came in which was a very very significant factor given the very significant levels of council housing, then that change was always going to be more noticeable here, because it was such a shift away from the known, and so you've got people who are kind of mourning the loss of what was there before. To an extent it's true of everywhere, but it is particularly marked here.

Hannah: And I mean does that come out – do people express that when they talk about the place itself, or that's-

June: People certainly express regret that things aren't... the way they were. When we said to people how can we improve your area, there was a very significant number of people who said, make it the way it was X years ago, and X varied from anything from 8 to 80 years ago, but it was always make it the way it used to be... So, that is a sign of a community that is mourning its past,

Hannah: Sure. And is that young people as well as older people, that came out with that?

June: I mean not, certainly, doesn't tend to be young as in terms of school age. You will find some sections of the community, sort of twenties and so on, in that they've heard it from their parents, but obviously it is much more marked in the older age groups and that's because they have that collective memory.

June does not here spell out exactly what 'the past' entails for the people who are characterised as grieving for it. The right of social tenants to buy their properties from the local authority was promoted by the Conservative government in the 1980s, reducing the amount of housing stock available for new prospective council tenants

and eventually increasing the number of former council properties which are privately let, as their former residents moved to another property. This a factor suggested by a number of interviewees as helping to give rise to the myth that new migrants were 'getting council housing' when they were more likely to be privately renting but in a property otherwise indistinguishable from the state-run properties around it. Aside from the housing issue, 'the past' is not specified, and June says that residents wanted the area to be 'the way it was anything from 8 to 80 years ago'. This suggests that this past is somewhat hazy, people having 'heard it from their parents'. The 'collective memory' of older age groups evokes this past as something specific, though of course collective memory can also be re-imagined.

June's analysis draws more direct attention to structural changes to life in Barking and Dagenham than did Phil's. As such, it might suggest that if there are problems at the level of employment and housing, the remedy should be sought at that level. However, June also uses the therapeutic language of 'mourning', suggesting policy might engage with issues in Barking and Dagenham in these terms. This differed from Ed's assessment:

Ed: We've done some focus groups in Barking and Dagenham, where obviously the BNP is quite strong on the council... and you just listen to what people are saying you think, we're not going to solve any of this by having a statement of national values or any of this stuff, actually this is about basic social and economic issues and it needs a response at that level and... I don't think anything that the government says about national identity or any of that will actually really cut the mustard at that level.

Ed here both explicitly states that the election of BNP representatives is a problem, and suggests that the subjects to be addressed in Barking and Dagenham are 'basic social and economic ones', rejecting a response in the register of emotion or values as inadequate. This is not to say that Ed denies that feelings about place are significant in Barking and Dagenham, but his prescription is differently nuanced to those of June and Phil.

This difference in assessments may be linked to their positions as policy practitioners. Ed is a think tank commentator outside of the local place, whose professional reputation is not invested in its success; more importantly perhaps, he is not responsible for implementing any of the policy prescriptions he makes. This enables him to suggest that social and economic issues, which are largely decided nationally, lie at the root of Barking and Dagenham's problems. June and Phil, on the other hand, are local government officers. Their positions are politically restricted, and they are required to work with councillors of whatever party is elected. More importantly, their professional positions require them to make not only an assessment of the local situation, but also to intervene. Yet the avenues available for their intervention are limited.

I would suggest that their emphasis on the need to manage a local 'grief curve', rather than on addressing underlying economic and political issues they see as contributing to this grief, is determined by what interventions seem possible at a local level. I do not mean to suggest that the emotional grief response that these interviewees described was not real or significant, or that they did not require intervention. Rather, the emphasis on issues of emotion, presentation and narrative arises because political and bureaucratic structures make it easier for local government to intervene in those terms, than to effect large-scale structural and economic change. The perhaps counter-intuitive result is that in maintaining the guise of 'neutral bureaucrat', June and Phil are led to emphasise *emotional* techniques and outcomes of governing, in preference to more materially-based ones.

### *Rebranding: 'A positive catalyst'*

Phil: A very important part of our approach, and you'll hear... our Chief Exec, say this, is that... he didn't want Barking [and] Dagenham to only be known as 'the BNP council'... It was only ever mentioned in that context... and so he in particular, and us as well, spent a lot of time trying to be known for other

things. So being the most improved council last year, going to four stars and improving stronger, all that performance stuff, and getting I think quite a good reputation on the national stage around policy, developing innovation and free school meals, and pre-schooling and all this sort of stuff, it's been really important to us, obviously, for its own sake as well... But also to say that actually Barking and Dagenham is much more than just 12 BNP councillors... and in fact, the BNP hardly figure really in our thinking... In many ways that's a quite positive catalyst and I think that national attention, because we have lots of people come here, ministers, senior civil servants, coming all the time now, a lot of them will come and then the first thing in their mind is BNP and how does that affect, but, very quickly, hopefully... they see all the other stuff we're doing and actually that the BNP's a very little, very small, minor part of it and it's the other stuff that's important... so I see it as a very positive thing, if it gets us some attention great, and then we can use that attention positively to show what we're doing.

Phil acknowledges that the BNP looms large in outsiders' perceptions of the borough, and indeed is the reason for a lot of interest. But he insists that not only is the BNP a 'minor' part of life in the borough, but that the attention (which he describes as warranting 'monthly' visits from ministers and civil servants concerned about the BNP presence) will quickly turn to the achievements of the council and partners. He describes this as a 'very positive thing' as it is an opportunity to promote work being developed in services which would otherwise not receive publicity or national government visits. In some ways Phil's insistence seems unrealistic, as it is clear that the association of the borough with the BNP has not been removed yet by this approach. Even my presence, as I discussed with him, was part of this process, and Phil cited many instances of innovative work to me, as part of the same strategy of presentation to outsiders.

This seemed to be part of a corporate strategy, providing a narrative that demonstrated a measured response to the election of the BNP. June's account is a good example:

June: The other big angle here that obviously everybody is conscious of was the

election results in May 06 which brought the BNP opposition in... now I have to say, that hasn't affected council policy, they're a tiny minority and they don't affect the policy of the council. It's brought a lot of extra attention to us. But probably what it did do was just make us particularly more conscious or refocus our efforts a) to be concerned for how it would feel to be, say, a BME member of the public living in the borough... but also to recognise that people voted the way that they did because they had legitimate concerns and therefore we needed to address those.

June acknowledged that the election of the BNP had brought attention to the borough but suggested that the main impact of this had been to 'refocus' existing efforts of the council to deal with the feelings of those threatened by the BNP, and the reasons that others had chosen to vote for them.

In these narratives, the importance of the election of these representatives was minimised (they were only 12 councillors on a local authority of 51 members, which remained Labour-led by a large majority) and their impact on policy dismissed. Instead, the impact of their election was described as a 'wake-up call' to local organisations to pay attention to the reasons these votes may have been cast. These were treated as protest votes about socio-economic issues and failures of local institutions and leadership, rather than as expressing support for the policies of the BNP. Liam, as a voluntary sector leader, gave one account of this:

Liam: A lot of our staff are volunteers, so we reflect local communities, both negatively as well as positively... We are having to deal with those same issues within the sector... but are not shying away from it... If anything the BNP are helping us to focus on the fact that we can't ignore this.

Liam argued that as a group of local organisations, the voluntary sector used the election result to understand opinions and issues in the borough. They were also made up of local residents and so likely to replicate some of the tensions outside, including representatives who may have voted for the BNP, or those who felt threatened by their presence, and residents experiencing the structural and emotional upheavals others

had identified. This sense of *being*, rather than *managing*, 'the community' seemed less strong in the other accounts I gathered from Barking and Dagenham policy practitioners, who talked about the questions of mourning a lost past as something that *others* (the residents of Barking and Dagenham) were doing, and not something in which they themselves were involved. This is in marked contrast to the way many people I interviewed in Oldham, Peterborough and especially Hackney were at pains to demonstrate that they *were* part of the local community, slipping between seeing themselves as governors and part of the population being governed. Perhaps the reason for this tendency to maintain a greater distance in Barking and Dagenham was linked to the very difficulty of finding a way to align oneself with a community who were being constituted through the problem of them having elected far right representatives.

One of the striking instances of positive news that Phil was keen to promote as an alternative Barking and Dagenham headline was as 'the most improved council last year'. This referred to the borough's triumph in the category of 'most improved council' at the Local Government Chronicle Awards in 2008. Of course, this is a somewhat dubious honour, as it does tend to suggest starting from a rather low base of performance; it is also a title claimed by Hackney in 2009. This turn of phrase, and its context, demonstrates how any positive claim to good performance is leapt upon in the relationship between a local authority and its outside partners. Phil's comments suggest that the reputation of the place is critical to policy practitioners working there, even if (or perhaps because) a 'brand' such as 'the BNP council' seems incredibly hard to shift. Before discussing the reasons for this importance, I will consider the place that Peterborough takes up in narratives of cohesion.

***Peterborough: 'All these East Europeans flooding in, picking all our tomatoes...'***

*Approaching Peterborough*

Philippa: The growth of the European Community and a lot of migrants coming in, they miscalculated and then suddenly there were all these... rural communities with migrants, that had never experienced that sort of thing, and that's the background to the community and integration commission.

Philippa, who worked for a local government research organisation, gave a succinct account of the relationship she saw between rurality, EU migration, and the development of community cohesion policy, and how it was treated as a problem requiring attention through a national policy commission. Though it is not as resonant a metonym as Barking and Dagenham or Oldham, Peterborough or 'places like it' were frequently invoked in discussions of cohesion to refer to such a rural or semi-rural place and its associations.

Philippa refers to miscalculations, by which she means the predictions that the expansion of the EU in 2004 might lead to between 5,000 and 13,000 migrants a year to the UK from the A8 accession countries (Dustmann et al, 2003:57). In practice the numbers were much larger than that, with a peak of 112,000 A8 migrants arriving in the UK in 2007 (though these figures have fallen since, and there is also considerable out-migration) (Vargas-Silva, 2011:4). Philippa emphasises that the arrival of new migrants in rural areas 'that had never experienced that sort of thing' was treated as a national problem to the extent that it was directly related to the instigation of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion in 2006. As noted in Chapters Three and Four, other narratives of cohesion policy consider that Commission a response to the London bombings of 2005. The point here, though, is that the idea of rural communities coming to terms with substantial immigration for the first time is geographically rooted in the narratives of policy practitioners.

The association with Peterborough emerged in Mark's reference in the opening of this chapter to 'the Peterboroughs of this world' where people 'worry about all these East

Europeans flooding in, picking all our tomatoes'. It appeared again when interviewing Michelle, a leading councillor in Hackney:

Hannah: How this discourse on cohesion... [has] affected your work?... Either explicitly or implicitly changed what you do?

Michelle: I think it's something I'm aware of in terms of newspapers and... actually I'm from Peterborough... I don't know if you're familiar with the issues in Peterborough and everyone is saying that all the Polish are taking their jobs and they've had lots of bad press about that so – and I guess as a councillor if you were in there or maybe Brad – or somewhere... you'd be asked to comment on it, I've never been asked to talk about it, explicitly.

Though Michelle draws on Peterborough partly because she is familiar with it as a former resident, she uses it to illustrate a contrast with the Hackney experience in line with the narrative of newly arrived Eastern European migrants resented by existing local residents who see them as competitors in the labour market. Note that despite her familiarity with Peterborough, Michelle emphasises *perceptions* of the place, rather than discussing immigration patterns or labour market dynamics themselves ('everyone is saying', 'they've had lots of bad press'). She suggests that the narrative of new immigration, and hostility to it, is part of a landscape of cohesion, when she makes (or almost makes) the link with Bradford as somewhere that, like Peterborough, councillors would 'be asked to comment on it'. These allusions demonstrate that Peterborough and Bradford are part of the narrative of cohesion policy in a way that Hackney is not. Others (perhaps national or local press or local government organisations) who might have otherwise asked her to comment in terms of community cohesion appear to share this understanding.

Sam, also a senior elected member in Hackney, similarly draws on Peterborough and its surrounding area as a contrast, to demonstrate a greater comfort with migration in frequently changing inner London:

Hannah: Just to go back to the kind of community cohesion idea itself, I mean do you see it linked to other types of policies that – say equalities, social



inclusion, immigration policies even, or is it – I mean you talked about the link with the Prevent stuff,

Sam: I can see it does nationally... hugely, particularly on Eastern Europeans in East Anglia and all that kind of thing... on the farms and stuff, but Hackney [4 second pause] it's [3 second pause] it's never really... come up in those terms... Let me qualify that by saying a great deal.

Sam's reference to 'Eastern Europeans in East Anglia', and to potential conflict over labour migration 'on farms and stuff', situates problems with integrating new migrants in the countryside.

Perceptions of migration as a cause of conflict over resources and consequent hostility to migrants has 'never really come up in those terms' according to Sam. In this, he also made a contrast between Hackney and narratives of Barking and Dagenham, saying political arguments in Hackney about 'the white working class not being able to get their kids a flat on their estate', which is 'only a few steps away' from it being 'because they're all going to somebody else' had never been a significant electoral issue for him; he had heard such racialised arguments about immigration and resource competition only 'once or twice in ten years, I mean I've probably heard that Elvis is still alive more often'.

### *Inside Peterborough*

Hannah: Is that how you, how people in Peterborough think of the place, that it was kind of fairly homogeneous and suddenly had to cope with new migration?

Ahmed: I think to a certain extent that is true... it was not fairly homogeneous, it was always a diverse community but that was a much more settled diverse community, there was a heavy number of Italians were here, but they were fairly well... cohesive or at least getting on with their life... there were a lot of Asians, relatively speaking, for a small place but they were still settled and getting on with their lives in a way, sometime, frankly, there might be a level of segregation [but]... it was kind of not problematic, in a way, but then

when with the Eastern Europeans, the wave of it, first it was the asylum seekers... and that kind of really injected a kind of bang, what is this?... Then this wave of migrations from the Eastern European problem, that is unprecedented for Peterborough in such a short time.

Ahmed worked on community cohesion policy in Peterborough. His narrative is at once in keeping with the narrative of a 'much more settled community' confronted with 'this wave of migrations that is unprecedented'. However, he complicates this in two ways. The first is to suggest that the existing, settled community was not an undifferentiated white, British population but included immigrant and immigrant-heritage communities from Italy and parts of Asia. In his account of this population (and of this time) he tries to strike a balance between presenting an overly nostalgic image or an overly problematic one. The second addition to the narrative is the first 'wave' of migration from 'asylum seekers' which 'really injected a kind of bang, what is this?' before the politicised and publicised arrival of Eastern European labour migrants (see Chapter Three). Despite trying to take this balanced tone, and perhaps despite himself, Ahmed consistently used terms like 'Eastern European *problem*' (my emphasis) to describe migration.

A slightly different inflection was given by Colin, a Peterborough councillor who, when I interviewed him, had only days before been given responsibility for the cohesion brief with the Council's Cabinet. His account was extremely positive, responding to my questions about perceptions of Peterborough by saying it was 'just the opposite of the national image, it's a fantastic place' – though he did not elaborate on what he understood 'the national image' of Peterborough to be, beyond my own suggestion about the narratives I had encountered of Peterborough as unused to immigration. Colin attempted to disrupt this narrative, like Ahmed describing the establishment of an Italian immigrant community following the second world war, and the consequent presence of 'third generation Italians' who are 'of course British now'. He also described a 'huge influx' of mainly Pakistani migrants to Peterborough in the late 1980s and early 1990s, followed by a 'huge influx' of economic migrants from the EU accession countries. Rather than a town unused to immigration, Colin described

Peterborough as a place enveloping successive flows of migrants, and while he described the descendants of Italian migrants as 'British now', his narrative was one of partial assimilation, claiming that different migrant groups were linked to particular industries (Italians largely bricklayers, Asians working in taxis, shops and clothing, and Eastern Europeans in agriculture) and that there were 'areas peculiar to particular people', that is, some level of voluntary segregation. This differentiation was seen as part of a multiculturalist model of living side by side, 'very multinational, almost like the UN'.

Whereas Colin provided an overwhelmingly positive narrative of cohesion in Peterborough (perhaps sometimes tinged with a rather patronising tone), Amrit, who worked in race equality in Peterborough, weighed negative stories about new Eastern European migrants against positive personal encounters with them. He added that regardless of the good character or otherwise of new arrivals, the rapid change in demographics had startled existing residents:

Amrit: It is a fact that Peterborough was a reception centre for refugees and asylum seekers... It is a fact that we have a large number of Polish, and East European countries, the chief constable will say to you that it is a fact that a large number of drink drunk offences are from A10 countries, okay? And it is also a fact that the prison population from A10 countries is actually increasing. That doesn't mean they're a bunch of criminals... Because some of the nicest people I've come across recently are people from Poland and the A10 countries... Having said that, it's what I was saying to you earlier, this is the sheer scale of things that have happened... which is beginning to frighten people. Rightly or wrongly, they are frightened about it.

Though Amrit's caveat about 'some of the nicest people' coming from A10 countries may seem to echo a traditionally mocked denial of racism ('some of my best friends are black' – see also Van Dijk (1992:89)), I think that here it is really intended to act as a 'myth-busting' technique. That is, Amrit really does want to insist that there is 'a lot to learn from them'. As a long-standing race equality campaigner, and a migrant himself (as a refugee from Uganda in the 1970s) Amrit is able to take a relatively sophisticated

position in his narrative of cohesion and immigration in Peterborough. He acknowledges that there are difficulties with some migrants, but wants to avoid stereotyping the whole group. He also offers an explanation of the conflict arising from migration as an emotional reaction to process and structure, rather than rooted in individual faults ('the sheer scale of things, which is beginning to frighten people'). Amrit's account moves away from a simplified characterisation of Peterborough as a marker of new immigration, through a more detailed chronology. In his account, Amrit attempts shift the debate from a binary idea of migration and migrants (or people fearful of migration and migrants) being either 'good' or 'bad'.

Erin, who worked for a community organisation in Peterborough, gave an example of the area's contemporary multiculture in practice. She tells of a conflict that escalated in the national and local media after two nights of 'what the papers called rioting but the police called disturbances' involving a group of newly arrived Kurdish migrants and some members of the established Pakistani community:

Erin: What they [journalists] did was they found the Kurdish café where the young lads hang out... and they interviewed the one person there who spoke the best English who happened to be a young lad that was a bit cocky... but he was actually just a young lad... interviewed by the media, stuff he said was terrible, it was things like, Pakistanis are all bad... And for the media it was like, see, these foreign people that are involved in wars can't live like us, don't understand British values, Pakistani community have lived here so long now, they're like, they are British, you know, it was all that sort of feeling going on about new arrivals.

Here, Erin is not describing her own perception of the differences between the two groups, but the way they were characterised in the media. Part of her point was that without established community organisations or networks, newly arrived groups of migrants were still treated as somehow bounded communities, from whom media (and government) sought spokespersons (a tendency perhaps reflected also in Colin's comments, quoted above, about the city being 'like the United Nations' – if this is read

as people existing peacefully, but separately, alongside one another in a form of segmented integration). While there was an established Pakistani Community Association whose head had been given media training and gave a 'really positive' statement about problems being with 'just a few individuals', so both groups should 'sit down and sort out the problems', the absence of such a structure for the Kurdish migrants led to a much less temperate account being sourced from 'a young lad' who perhaps had thought less about how his statement might be used. Erin described this as providing an opportunity for media outlets to not only invoke an idea of a lack of 'British values' among 'these foreign people', but to underline their point while at the same time insulating themselves from accusations of xenophobia by contrasting the young man's response with that of the 'Pakistani community' who were seen as successfully absorbing these 'British values' (echoing Colin's statement about descendants of Italian migrants being 'British now').

Colin, Ahmed and to some extent Erin all suggest that Peterborough policy practitioners view the town as having been fairly comfortable with a level of relatively long-standing ethnic difference. They resist the characterisation of the place as entirely untouched by migration in the past and so somehow unsophisticated. Instead, they suggest that what residents found hard to deal with was not the fact of migration, but the scale and character of more recent migrations. But, as previous chapters have shown, there are other aspects to community cohesion policy besides migration. In Peterborough, the local authority takes in the city and its surrounding countryside. It seemed to me that this might present particular ways of thinking about cohesion, in terms of both comfort with change, diversity and migration, and competing priorities between rural and urban residents.

At the end of my meeting with Colin, the councillor, he began to describe a 'divide' between urban and rural areas of Peterborough. He said that as the elected representative for a rural area, he had taken steps to introduce urban and rural people to one another, 'and that's community cohesion too'. Stuart, a senior local authority officer in Peterborough, provided more detailed comments on the subject:

Stuart: There's a massive difference between the urban and rural areas around our city. You've got one of the most deprived wards right in the centre, where you've got some really rich, affluent areas right out here on the outskirts, and their views of life will be poles apart. It's interesting to go to [one of the village halls] for a meeting where, as a Peterborian, I'm told there – cos they see themselves as a separate and distinct community – we would love to put a wall around our village to prevent people from Peterborough coming into it!

Hannah: Yeah

Stuart: [laughs] So you really have got people that are massively different in their views and opinions, and you've gotta reflect that in the service provision that you give. And I think that's right to reflect that. But they can also become equally as scared and have really complex community cohesion issues, I mean there is a report around a potential Travellers' site being built in what is probably one of the most beautiful areas that we've got on the outskirts of our city, surrounded by some of the richest houses that we've got and that will cause distinct fears and worries for that community if we don't manage it properly.

Here, Stuart characterises an urban-rural divide not only on the basis of location, but also in terms of economic difference; of place attachment and belonging; of 'views and opinions'; and of ethnicity. Stuart describes rural communities expressing a strong sense of local belonging, which they construct in opposition to 'others', even those who might see themselves as fellow 'Peterborians'. The example of controversy over the building of a Travellers' site as part of a much larger housing development brings together the entanglements between power struggles invoking class, ethnicity, belonging, nation and access to basic resources. Potentially, thinking about the rights of different groups in the countryside and the city to space and particularly to dwelling, could be an opening for exploring different inflections of community cohesion policy in Peterborough, beyond the narrative of coping with new international immigration in which it is usually understood. This might open up questions of distribution of economic resources locally and nationally. However, as I will discuss in the next section, the tactics for regaining control of Peterborough's community cohesion narratives

which I found among local practitioners were not to reject or complicate these narratives, but to work within their logics.

*Rebranding: 'a city that has had massive change and found ways of dealing with it'.*

City MP Stewart Jackson claims Peterborough should fight back against recent negative national press by highlighting its good points. In recent weeks national newspapers have highlighted squalid migrant camps in the city and alleged Peterborough is 'overrun' with immigrants who are stretching city schools and services to breaking point... Mr Jackson says: 'Peterborough needs to hit back hard with a positive and compelling narrative about the city's strengths.' (Reville, 2010).

The local press story above highlights the importance that Peterborough's MP, Stewart Jackson, places upon the reputation the area has nationally. Jackson is quoted as directly addressing the power of 'compelling narrative'. The article refers to a 1980s television advertising campaign which used the slogan 'The Peterborough Effect' and an actor dressed as a Roman centurion to promote positive messages about 'how the city had moved on since the Roman times'.<sup>64</sup> Jackson urges that this should be revived, 'to get our message across in London and beyond, to the opinion formers and decision takers who can make things happen' (Jackson, 2010). Once again, the negative stories that are to be refuted centre on immigration and link new arrivals to the city with pressure on public services and 'squalid' improvised housing. This news story and the comment piece to which it refers are not aiming to change the thinking (or practice) on 'problems with migration', but to put that narrative to one side in favour of associating Peterborough with 'strengths' instead.

Ahmed, as a local authority officer directly involved in developing local community cohesion policy, voiced a different strategy which might address the issues of housing need or stretched public services while contextualising the role of immigration in these pressures:

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<sup>64</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vkga1cGex4E>

Ahmed: The first top priority now, is socio-economic impact... on communities, particularly vis à vis migration, economic downturn, and homelessness... we're also trying to change it around [so] it's not looking at the migrant worker and the issues they cost... it's as a social impact on the wider community.

Ahmed described how the Local Strategic Partnership wanted to move on from simply looking at the needs of new migrants, to looking at service needs. The intention was not to remove migration from the discussion, but to think about 'social impact on the wider community', including both migrants and non-migrants, of questions such as 'economic downturn' and 'homelessness'. Despite Ahmed's suggestion that this had been agreed as the new strategy for local leaders, the examples of how the area had been 'rebranded' to change national perceptions of local community cohesion used quite different narratives.

I found that policy practitioners did describe ways they had reached 'opinion formers and decision takers' with messages that Peterborough was coping with new migration. The principal approach was not a traditional marketing campaign using advertisements to appeal to residents or investors. Rather, policy practitioners presented their local situation to national policy makers within the terms of community cohesion narratives, as a place with potential for successful government intervention promoting community cohesion. As a result, the local authority was able to promote itself as an example of good practice from which others could learn, and *this* became the narrative lens for understanding Peterborough's relationship to community cohesion policy. Erin described it thus:

Erin: I think we've been seen as a city that has had massive change but has tried to find ways of dealing with it... whereas a lot of cities have had massive change but haven't really woken up to the fact.

This reputation of having 'woken up' to massive change and finding 'ways of dealing



with it' was one that had been negotiated through specific appeals to central government framed in the place-based community cohesion narratives with which we have become familiar:

Erin: So it all got a bit tense and resulted in the different agencies that were working together... saying look we need to try and get some funding from government to deal with this before we have a Oldham and Bradford riot... so the police, the council, and health went to the Home Office and said if you give us some money we will do lots of work to make things better in Peterborough... projects that will help new arrivals to integrate... and if we stop a riot, it means that we'll save Peterborough five million, because that's how much it cost the Bradford and Oldham riots per night... I mean it's a bit – weird.

Erin describes how local agencies negotiated with central government to provide funding to Peterborough for services to support the integration of new arrivals. This was initially to support the use of Peterborough as a dispersal centre for asylum seekers. Erin suggests that the most effective way to convince central government to release funds was to argue for the need to prevent disorder, with the ability to measure the projected effects of this in monetary terms. The 'Oldham and Bradford riot' is invoked not only as a spectre of the worst-case scenario of failed community cohesion, foreshadowed by previous outbreaks of racialised violence. 'Oldham and Bradford riots' are also important as a yardstick for justifying intervention in terms of good accounting, as much as good politics. Though Erin's comment that 'it's a bit – weird' suggests she sees some incongruity in deciding to prevent civil disturbances on the basis of a financial analysis, she is politically savvy enough to see this as a privileged technology of persuasion in intra-government negotiations. From being principally associated with community cohesion problems (according to another Peterborough practitioner, the city featured in the national community tension team's monitoring report every week because of the potential for a riot), Erin suggested that Peterborough was now seen as having a national reputation as a community cohesion success story.

## ***Conclusions***

Through this chapter, I have shown how three places have been used in anecdotal understandings of community cohesion policy, by policy practitioners anxious to distinguish their own locality from problem scenarios of community cohesion. I have discussed how, within each of these places, policy practitioners recognise the labels that have been attached to their area, and try to complicate these narratives by producing more nuanced accounts drawing on their local knowledge (and how resenting their area's associations with community tensions of one sort or another does not prevent policy practitioners from talking in this way about other places). In each of the three places, I have shown how policy practitioners have taken this reputational work further. Rather than devoting all of their energies to negating the associations between the place and narratives of community cohesion problems, many have tried to lever this notoriety to their locality's advantage. They have promoted Oldham as a community cohesion success story from which others can learn; they have tried to use national attention to showcase social inclusion projects in Barking and Dagenham; and they have secured national funding and support for services to new residents in Peterborough by arguing that the place's risky community cohesion status required intervention.

In each of these three examples, this rebranding has taken place within policy practitioners' professional circles. Their associations with significant events in the development of community cohesion policy exist in wider public culture, and to some extent the policy practitioners I interviewed described ways they had tried to challenge this (for example, the One Oldham local branding campaign for residents, and attempts by each of them to attract positive coverage in national media). But their main focus was on the perceptions of their colleagues in national government, local government, and associated bodies. This is, of course, the arena in which 'community cohesion policy' (in those terms) is a topic of most interest. It is where performance indicators,

league tables, inspection reports, beacon status, achievement awards, sharing of good practice, conference appearances, case studies and toolkits are currencies of reputation and reward, both institutionally and individually. These are reputational tools through which local government negotiates power (on behalf of residents). They rely on persuasive (and hence affective) narratives. In order to be persuasive, and easily understood, policy practitioners often knowingly simplify such narratives, creating silences around difficult subjects which are hard to address forthrightly because of the uncomfortable positions they reveal about the limited power local government has over decisions about and reputation of its territory.

When it is not possible to disassociate from community cohesion policy, it becomes necessary to either fight against, or work within it. In this chapter we have seen how policy practitioners conduct such negotiations with regard to place. Chapter Seven will address how policy practitioners fit *themselves* into narratives of community cohesion, policy making, and government.

## **Chapter Seven: 'You need to be totally objective, but you can't be'**

### ***Introduction***

Previous chapters have considered how difficult subjects are narrated and negotiated in relation to different topics, times, and places. In this chapter, drawing on interviews from all of the local and national research sites, I concentrate on how policy practitioners talk about community cohesion policy and the difficult subjects it invokes in relation to themselves, how they locate themselves and are located by others. I argue that for the most part, the trope of the situated subject and situated knowledges have entered the 'common sense' of policy practice in such a way that all interviewees said, in one way or another, that their biography influenced their practice. Some interviewees appeared to feel obliged to describe their viewpoint as particular, but would then refer to this particular viewpoint as a 'neutral' one. Other interviewees emphasised values and ethics of equality and inclusivity which motivated them in their work and life; sometimes this involved resisting identity politics, at other times linking personal experiences of marginalisation to political commitments. For many, affiliation with 'difference' and ideals of equality was demonstrated through living in multicultural areas (particularly when bringing up children) or through their career choices. For others, understanding their own viewpoint as particular was not felt as a special obligation in work contexts, but experienced as a way of being in the world. This chapter explores the extent to which interviewees' own social positioning was drawn on as a resource with which to negotiate difficult subjects; and the extent to which it became a difficult subject in itself, to be negotiated around.

This is tied up in many interviewees' narratives with moments at which they recognise their identification (by other people) as somehow marginal – as 'a problem' (Du Bois, 1994 [1903]:1; Fanon, 2008 [1952]; Lorde, 1984). Whether or not an epiphanic moment (Denzin, 1989) could be identified, many interviewees made claims to a form of 'double consciousness' in which a 'sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused

contempt and pity' (Du Bois, 1994 [1903]:2) enabled them to recognise the ambiguities, power struggles and complications of others' lives.

The types of 'difference' or 'problem' interviewees felt themselves to constitute in particular situations varied widely, in terms of the trauma of this experience, the ease with which one could avoid this identification (or 'pass') by changing behaviours or contexts, or the persistence or interactions of such identifications. Of most concern in this chapter are the ways interviewees used such narratives as a resource in negotiating difficult subjects: as claims to authenticity, as claims to authority, as claims to understanding or knowledge, or as claims to a lack of any of these.

These questions go beyond concerns about complex, fluid or multiple identities as discussed in the literature on intersectionality (e.g. Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1983; Crenshaw, 1994; McCall, 2005; Valentine, 2007). To understand these positionings, I draw on feminist, post-colonial and queer writings about 'passing' which build on standpoint theory and elaborate on ways to consider difference without reinforcing hierarchical categories of domination by considering the subject who passes or is 'passed' by others (passing between a category in which one feels oneself to belong and a category one claims or is assigned) (Ahmed, 2000:125-133; Ali, 2003:12-14; Haritaworn et al, 2008; Izakson, 1995; Walker, 1993). Where the difference between these categories is embedded in status and power differences, being assigned or claiming an identity 'up' the social hierarchy can produce ambiguous feelings for those who have learnt that they do not 'really' belong to that category. Yet there is also a consideration in some of this literature of what happens when privileged subjects make claims to marginality and how or whether this can ever be received, or experienced, as authentic (e.g. hooks, 1990; Piper, 2002; Skeggs, 2001; Ware, 2002). Specifically, the parallels with work on 'passing' are the structuring of power relations involved in the different forms of passing or critical self-identification; the moral ambiguity that many (but not all) suggested they experienced because of the risk of being perceived as inauthentic in some way; and in the disruptive or uncomfortable positions that many (but not all) interviewees asserted.

My analysis of the positions interviewees took builds on debates about the proper role of a 'neutral' bureaucrat, demonstrating how policy practitioners often recognised the impossibility of neutrality even whilst it remained an ideal, and found strategies to negotiate this difficulty. Those interviewees who found the least problematically self-exculpatory position to understand their relationship to their work were those who found ways to keep their subject position uncomfortable; to keep questions open and unstable, but nevertheless to take a position (Hunter, 2010; Keith, 2008b). This, I would argue, is a way of 'choosing the margin' in the sense I understand bell hooks' call, as a call to solidarity (hooks, 1990; see Chapter Two). This is different to 'passing' where passing is understood as a move between two theoretically stable categories, and choosing the margin means openly disrupting those categories.

### ***Reflexivity as reflex action***

The recognition that all knowledge is situated (Haraway, 1988) appeared to have become received wisdom for my interviewees. Following the emphasis the first six participants gave to personal narratives in pilot interviews, I asked all remaining interviewees, towards the end of the interview, whether (and if so how) they felt their own identity, background and experiences might affect their understandings of community cohesion policy (see also Hoggett et al, 2006a, 2006b; Hunter, 2003; Mayo et al, 2007). Initial reactions varied; some were taken aback and hesitated, before articulating for what they suggested was the first time their personal relationship to their work and these subjects. Many of these interviewees would comment on how interesting it was to think of their work in this way, and seemed genuinely pleased to consider these subjects in what appeared to be a fresh way, albeit that most interviewees had already used personal narratives to negotiate our discussions of community cohesion policy throughout the interview. The second broad type of response was an immediate assertion, either that everyone's understandings are always influenced by their background, identity and experiences; or that this was certainly true of the interviewee personally. By far the most common reaction was

agreement, more or less in one of these two forms. And even those who stated categorically that they were entirely unaffected by such influences stated elsewhere in the interview that their background *had* shaped them.

I will demonstrate how the idea of situated knowledge has become a form of received wisdom using extracts from two quite different interview encounters. Alice was a long-standing colleague of mine who had been aware of and supportive of my research project for some time, and a senior officer within Hackney who therefore might well be expected to be conversant with policy and political debates about identity and inequality. Donald, a senior officer in a free market think tank, was less concerned in his day-to-day work with issues he classed as related to diversity or equality. Their (party) political persuasions were also divergent, Alice being a member of the Labour Party and Donald's work very closely associated with the Conservative Party. Firstly, Alice:

Hannah: Do you think that your background or identity or whatever, affects how you think about cohesion?

Alice: Yeah I'm sure it does.

Hannah: Mmhm

Alice: Erm... [6 second pause] Yeah. I don't know how though, cos I haven't thought about that [laughs] erm which you obviously should do... I don't think about my own background and identity, I think about what is fundamental to... my beliefs about what is important, which is that you treat everyone equally... I'd rather work and live in an environment where there's a range of different people from different places, cos that's considerably more interesting than living in a place... that is quite monocultural.

Here, Alice immediately agrees that she is 'sure' her background does affect how she thinks about cohesion, but is then much more hesitant in finding the words to explore how and in what respects this might be the case. Alice seems to feel obliged to exhibit an awareness of social positioning, yet not to have articulated this to herself in a narrative that is readily drawn on in the interview situation. What I want to note especially here is that Alice does not seem surprised by this question, and indeed she

appears to have a strong sense of what the answer 'should' be. Throughout the interview, she seemed to feel very self-conscious about trying to anticipate how I might later think about her comments; and yet this did not manifest itself as an unwillingness to talk around the questions I raised. Rather, the stumbling over how to express what she meant, felt, or did in relation to a greater certainty about what she *should* feel, was quite striking. The processes of self-governing, disciplined selves clearly operate within, as well as through, the structures of government (see also Rose, 1999a, 1999b).

For Donald, however, the question about whether or how his own positioning informed his ideas and practice appeared both startling and troubling, despite his having already drawn attention to some aspects of this earlier in the interview, in the following exchange:

Hannah: The government's statements on community cohesion often focus on race, ethnicity and faith... do you think that will be something that's around in a Conservative version of that?

Donald: I think that is an interesting question, I should say here I'm a Catholic and I'm a governor of a Catholic school, I've written books on Catholic social teaching, so a thing such as civil society and subsidiarity I find very complementary to the general [name of think tank] philosophical beliefs.

Though Donald did not explore how he was positioned in other ways in relation to power, he did feel the need in one sense to 'declare an interest' related to his ethical and personal commitments which might inform his otherwise supposedly neutral stance. But when I tried to explore this in more depth:

Hannah: When I'm talking about community cohesion policy to people, they often talk about their own identity and background... and you mentioned your Catholicism

Donald: Yeah okay

Hannah: So I just wondered if you feel that your own – background affects how you think about this issue?

Donald: Ooh, gosh. Er [pause] Marxist, isn't it? [both laugh] er... [3 second pause]



well I suppose Marx would argue that our background affects how we think about an issue even if we don't believe it does, [laughs] no, I mean I don't think so, no.

Hannah: mmhm

Donald: No. Erm.... and I must admit it's only relatively recently that I've begun to study Catholic social teaching as an academic subject although I've always been a Catholic, and my sort of economic and political ideas were sort of formed before I started studying those things so no I, er, I er... I don't think so particularly.

In seeming to equate identity politics with Marxism, Donald may be thinking of 'background' as referring to class, or perhaps simply using 'Marxist' to stand in for 'left-wing' in general. Yet the question as I framed it specifically referred back to his previous references to his Catholicism and how it informed his outlook. This was partly because I already had some nervousness about asking this question to an interviewee I perceived as likely to be unsympathetic to a reading of policy-making as culturally embedded. Despite my attempts to link back to earlier in our conversation and demonstrate how the question may be relevant and perhaps relatively unthreatening, Donald chooses instead to disassociate himself from his previous comments by saying that Catholic social teaching has simply become important to him as he has learnt that it accords with his pre-existing beliefs. Yet Donald's sense of needing to declare an interest in terms of his religious commitments suggests that even those who reject cultural politics as having no bearing on the possibility of 'neutrality' have been reached to some extent by critiques of objectivity. For Alice and Donald, the concept of situated knowledge appears to have seeped through to become received wisdom without necessarily being engaged, theorised or put into action in the everyday. But other interviewees re-incorporated this reflexivity to re-assert, paradoxically, a view from nowhere (see also Skeggs, 2004:131).

### ***Reinscribing the norm***

Hannah: I just wondered if you think your own background or experience and identity affect how you think about these kind of issues?

Andrew: In terms of my own personal background?

Hannah: Mmm.

Andrew: Right, okay. I think it probably would do, cos... I think that because I'm not from any of the visibly recognised equality theme groups... the fact that I'm able to come at it from a fresh perspective, that I don't have any particular, it sounds terrible saying, I don't have any particular axe to grind, that I can look at things in different ways.

David: I spose my... life experiences, I don't know... or lack of them

Hannah: [laughs]

David: Means I spose I'm fairly open to - about it.

In the first extract above, Andrew states that not being part of a 'visibly recognised equality group' means he has no 'particular axe to grind'. This is a particularly striking as Andrew is speaking as an equalities officer. Later in the interview he suggested that equality, diversity and community cohesion issues should be addressed as questions of customer service and efficiency, and that this would naturally reduce inequalities for those otherwise subjected to systematic discrimination and disadvantage. Thus, he is aware of the 'visibly recognised equality theme groups' and that he is not part of them; but he does not describe this status as being part of an alternative (perhaps white, male, professional) 'theme group'. Instead, he becomes immediately neutral, normal and invisible again; he has 'no axe to grind'. David, in the second extract, provides a similar account of himself. He is one of the most senior local authority officers in Hackney and he also agreed that 'whatever your background you'll have a view', and gave some examples of backgrounds which, if he had experienced them, he thought would give him a different perspective ('if I was Orthodox Jewish... if I was an Asian Muslim...'). But his own life was literally invisible; his experiences as a white male professional were a 'lack of' 'experiences'. And he went on to describe this not as a barrier to carrying out his role, but enabling him to be 'fairly open', much like Andrew's

lack of 'axe to grind'.

The treatment of white, male, middle class identity as unmarked and unremarked has been widely noted (e.g. Ahmed, 2004a; Hearn, 2010:175; Hunter, 2010; Skeggs, 2004:133; Swan, 2010) and indeed this invisibility is part of the privilege of such identities. But I want to suggest that the persisting ability to think of these identities as 'standard' requires more work in the context of my research than it may otherwise. These interviewees have to re-situate themselves as the norm ('because I'm not from any of the visibly recognised equality theme groups') rather than this position remaining entirely silent. But it does not take *much* work; and it can be a technique of reincorporating reflexivity into the service of existing hierarchies of power as a way of demonstrating knowledge and awareness, and thereby reproducing elite status (Skeggs, 2004:148).

This position is developed further in Thomas's account below. Thomas is a national figure, who has been involved in public discussions of community cohesion policy since 2001, and is widely seen as an expert in this area and often commissioned to produce research and advice on the work done by local authorities to develop community cohesion. He is also a middle-aged, white male professional.

Hannah: I just wondered if you felt like your own identity, experiences or background affect how you think about these issues?

Thomas: Er no not really I mean I suppose... I was committed to anti-racism at least by the time I was 16, and I grew up through the sixties... and I only ever wanted to work for organisations that were progressive, that wanted change. In urban environments, where I felt comfortable, really.

Hannah: yeah

Thomas: I suppose... it's about what you feel comfortable with. I've never had the slightest inclination to think about my own identity, I'm not an introspective person, some people are very introspective... if I think of myself as being white, it is only because I know that there are black and Asian people there... and that's why of course most black and Asian people think of themselves as being black and Asian, it's because they're in a white society... it's not how I

see myself, it's how I see myself in relation to others. So I'm a bit anti all of that introspection stuff really.

Thomas's account shifts between theoretical, personal and political registers to account for his understandings of community cohesion and related subjects. Though he begins by saying 'not really', he then says that his values, in particular anti-racism, have informed his career since a young age, and that he has always felt more comfortable in 'urban' and 'progressive' environments. He also talks about identity only being defined in reaction to other categories, and went on to discuss at greater length groups identifying themselves in relation to a constitutive outside (without using that terminology). Yet, while 'black and Asian people' might 'think of themselves as being black and Asian because they're in a white society', Thomas does not explore how his being white in a white society enables him to follow his 'inclination' not to think about his identity outside of encounters with 'black and Asian people'. He says dismissively that 'some people are very introspective', but in positioning identity as a question of introspection, he disregards the power relations which enable him to do so in the first place.

The ways Andrew, David and Thomas negotiate their own status in relation to community cohesion policy and government in general reveals much about the work done by the ambiguities and silences of community cohesion policy in masking power. Andrew, David and Thomas have been exposed, through professional discourses of the public sector if not elsewhere, to discussions of how gendered, racialised and other categorisations have excluded certain groups from access to power and resources. But they have not taken these understandings further to imagine either how their own inclusion might be part of the process of exclusion; or what they might have *in common* with people who have been excluded in this way. Thus, for Thomas, being in 'urban environments' is what makes him 'feel comfortable'; this reflection does not raise any difficulties for him about what enables him to feel comfortable, or how this may or may not be shared with others.

### ***Marginalisation and double consciousness***

Hannah: I just wondered if you think that identity, experience, background affect how you, personally, think about cohesion issues?

Anthony: Absolutely.

Hannah: Yeah... In what way? [both laugh]

Anthony: Well... I think anyone from, er, a minority ethnic group has had to think about these issues. I think someone from a mixed heritage background, has probably articulated them more, whether that's shouting, [laughs] or having discussions over dinner tables about, and dad are you really a negro, or the experience of my sister who was pale and blue eyed and [said], in 1970, yeah I do wanna join a black society. Black civil society. But, why, how, no, you! Can't! You know.

Hannah: mm

Anthony: My family has had a long experience of challenging all the issues of ethnicity and of race and questioning what they mean in different ways, being categorised as absolutely every ethnic group under the sun, so I just think that that's how it has shaped my thinking on it... the other probably big experience is being in Tower Hamlets and the BNP got elected, and having to figure out ways of articulating many of these issues to friends and also publicly, and the whole thing around race and people saying yes but there are different races... and trying to explain to people... you're wrong. Not true, it doesn't exist.

Earlier, Thomas described a lack of inclination to think about his identity, background or experiences as formative influences. This is not a choice Anthony, a policy manager in Hackney, felt was available to him. Anthony's response is in two parts. Firstly, he describes how ethnic and racial constructions of his and his family's appearance were taken to embody difference in ways sometimes expressly at odds with their choosing.<sup>65</sup> In arguing that some people (including him) 'have been thinking about these issues for 30 years', particularly 'anyone from a minority ethnic group [or] a mixed heritage background', I don't think Anthony is suggesting that *only* people of particular

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<sup>65</sup> This echoes closely Suki Ali's (2003:13) account and analysis of growing up in a 'mixed-race' family.

ethnicities have an authentic understanding of the complexities of identity and power. Rather, he is pointing out that for some people, such questions are immediate because they are constantly made visible (see also Du Bois, 1994 [1903]:1; Haraway, 1988:584).

Though Anthony describes his long-standing 'double consciousness', his awareness of the shifting categorisations applied to him and to others throughout his life, he also provides a second narrative of an epiphanic moment in which he is moved to another relationship to racialising and differentialising processes. The 'other big experience' Anthony suggests has formed his understandings is living in east London when a far right racist party first gained an elected position on the local council. This mobilised him not only to negotiate the constructions of himself by others ('being categorised as absolutely every ethnic group under the sun'), but to become politically and intellectually active in articulating, in various registers, other ways of deconstructing and understanding racialised imaginaries.

Saida, like Anthony, worked in Hackney. She also accounted for her understandings as related to a situated knowledge and a positioning as a minoritised subject. But rather than Anthony's narrative of always having understood identity as challenging, she describes a greater comfort in difference and change which came from being accustomed to them, growing up in London. She contrasts this with her experience of temporarily moving to Northampton, which provided her with a different type of epiphany when she was made aware of the perception of her own difference by others (see Ali, 2003:170):

Hannah: I just wondered how you think your own background and identity and experiences affect how you think about issues around cohesion?

Saida: mm

Hannah: In your work.

Saida: I suppose for anyone I think that would be quite natural, you know you can try and separate yourself and put your professional hat on and say the things you need to say... but, yeah, evidently, my own experiences form – if I was looking at my personal experiences, me being born in this country, parents

from Bangladesh, have a Muslim faith, Sunni faith at that, and living in an area which is changing... So in that sense yeah, I suppose your own experiences do shape how you think of cohesion, for me because I've been brought up in my own background and then had friends from different communities you sort of think oh it's kind of normal to be getting along with someone that is black or white or Chinese, cos in my school everyone was so mixed... and university was mixed and... where I work is quite mixed so it was quite normal but trying to get work in Northampton was a very different experience... cos I was seen different. So... you think, why is it, I mean I'm same person, nothing's changed, so why's it so difficult for me to get work in Northampton?

Hannah: mm

Saida: So, yeah. There is that and, in that sense you can start viewing and thinking, you start looking for justifications as to why things are the way they are, and you try and put things together. I suppose in [my work] that's quite important as well... so yeah, that's one of the things I think about.

Saida's account of her experience of growing up in multicultural London places her both as *particular* ('born in this country, parents from Bangladesh, Muslim faith, Sunni faith at that') and comfortable in a shared sense of difference ('it's kind of normal'). But when she tried to find work in a different city, the identities she was already aware of living became visible in a different way; she was differently marked. From Saida's other brief comments on this in the interview, she felt that the problem was not necessarily that there were no Muslim/Sunni/Bangladeshi heritage people in Northampton (making her the first to present her visible difference in this way) but that attitudes to 'difference' there were much more hostile than she was used to. It seemed she had experienced so much discrimination in seeking employment that she had returned to London to work, at some cost to her household and family arrangements. Yet the way Saida described this impacting on her work was not as a claim to an authentic identity politics, or explicitly as a commitment to oppositional anti-racism. Rather, she related her experience and her reactions to contexts in which others (her service users) might have had similar experiences and how she might empathise with them. She used her double consciousness – her awareness of others' perceptions of her and how they

differed to her own – as a tool for governing others through her professional role.

Nadia, a London councillor, described how she perceived that her role as an elected member had been influenced by her structural positioning. Nadia focused more directly on how she felt her marked identity had had a direct influence on her career path than did Anthony and Saida, whose accounts were more focused on how their everyday lives and understandings had been formed.

Nadia: From 2002 onwards I think the role of a councillor changed dramatically.

But I think it also pushed me into a role where... you know, there's not that many young Asian women that were coming into politics... for me personally, I think it's put me into a position where I don't think my - the work that I've had to take on as a local councillor

Hannah: Yeah

Nadia: is very different to, you know, other... you know, anyone else that may have come in at the same time as me, elsewhere. You know I don't think they would have been thrown in, in the same way.

Nadia suggests that her experience of being a councillor has been shaped by national changes to the role. I think here she is referring to the reforms to local government following the Local Government Act 2000, in particular the establishment of executive leaders and elected mayor and cabinet governance. Nadia herself had been appointed to a cabinet role relatively soon after being elected to the council, a role with a particular responsibility for community cohesion issues. The implication of her words here is that her status as one of the relatively few 'young Asian women' in politics had meant she was more visible, not only for promotion but potentially also as a voice seen to speak with 'authenticity' about community cohesion and related issues. The structures of power and visibility are such that Nadia recognised not only how she was positioned by others as specifically young, Asian and female. She also felt she was required to embody that identity as a form of authenticity, not only for herself, but for her political colleagues, to give residents and voters confidence in the local authority's representation and understanding of local residents. Her embodiment of this identity



was made visible to her in connection with her professional position in a way that it was not visible to many of the white interviewees I spoke with (see also Ahmed, 2007a; Hunter, 2010; Puwar, 2001, 2004; Swan, 2010). Even though very many white interviewees commented on their privileged status in terms of their ability or perceived ability to speak for diverse communities, not one suggested that their whiteness had any bearing on why or how they came to be in their current professional position.

### ***Moving margins***

Hannah: ... whether you think your own kind of background and identity affect how you think about those issues?

Emma: Yeah. I think being Irish and coming over here in the late eighties... Yeah, I think [both laugh] absolutely! And sitting on the number 36 bus outside Victoria station when a bomb went off, yes, there's a lot in your background makes you think about that... So yes definitely, definitely. And in terms of working for local government... that's actually very difficult, because the whole culture of the organisation is that you need to repress that view and you need to be totally objective but you can't be. You can't be, you've gotta temper the worst of your instincts and my instincts sometimes are just to completely rant at people, but you modify your behaviour. But no, your background is definitely, definitely a strong influence.

Emma, a senior local authority officer in Hackney, felt that in some ways a marked identity she might have once shared with Nadia had now been erased; yet she still retained the double consciousness of one who has been marked out as different by the gaze of others. She is aware of her privileged position as a policy practitioner expressly because of her previously (more) marked identity as an outsider, and perhaps has a feeling that her now more secure position within 'the establishment' presents the opportunity, whether she takes it or not, to pass as an insider.

The moves Emma can make are determined by how she is positioned in social space.

Emma explains that her history as a migrant from Ireland to London at the time of sectarian and nationalistic violence has influenced her understanding of being minoritised, demonised and vulnerable. Elsewhere in the interview she gave a specific example of this influencing her work, when she explained 'to this ex-intelligence officer from you know, MI whatever, who was working in the Home Office' that she would have been the target of their work twenty years ago, 'you know, demonising Irish people whereas now it's Muslim. Who's next?'. Describing how the 'demonisation' has moved on from Irish people to another group, Emma suggests she could now pass as no longer a threat; but she still feels a responsibility to speak up as an othered subject (Nickels et al, 2009).

Yet this speaking out is the 'rant' which she feels the need to 'monitor', in order to be 'objective'. Feeling completely embedded in her own histories, believing that 'you need to be totally objective *but you can't be*' for Emma means doing work on herself to 'repress' her instincts to recognise resonances with her own life. In the same sentence in which she asserts the need for objectivity, Emma recognises its impossibility. Her professional commitment to strive towards an (impossible) impartiality comes into conflict with her knowledge of this impossibility, and is held in tension as she tries to understand this as a question of working on herself ('temper the worst of your instincts'). This is the work of being a public servant, balancing public goods and individual need, balancing one's own personal, political and ethical commitments with organisational and democratically agreed priorities. Being able to manage these balancing acts is an essential skill for working in such environments, but is under-acknowledged and under-explored, perhaps because of some of the unsettled positions which might emerge (see Bonnett, 1993:79; Hunter, 2005; Keith, 2008b; Mayo et al, 2007).

Evan, another senior manager in Hackney, also describes his understanding of community cohesion as tied up with his own subjectivity, which he narrates as at once giving him insights into the experience of difference and discrimination, and in other ways apparently disqualifying him from authoritative insights. Evan drew on biographical elements throughout our conversation, well before I asked him directly

about his background, identity and experiences:

Evan: I think it's also difficult because a lot of the people involved particularly for example in Muslim communities, younger people born here, the values are potentially very different from kind of general, liberal values that the society in Britain supposedly has. And I think it's because these haven't really been clearly set out, I think the assumption is that everybody has the same values, just rub along. From a Hackney point of view, I've lived in Hackney thirty years. And I think it is an amazing place, culturally speaking. I mean I'm a gay man. So I have that perspective on it. And I just think it's incredible that you go to Springfield Park on a Sunday afternoon, and you see all these different communities using cultural space and as I say, rubbing along, it is impressive.

Here (in a much longer response to my question 'what [do] you think about when you think about cohesion policy? How would you describe it?') Evan has moved on to the subject of 'values', and how to manage perceived differences in values between 'communities'. In this context, he gives the example of Muslim communities as a potential threat to 'general, liberal values that Britain supposedly has'. Evan seems to sense that this is a potentially contentious subject, and immediately reasserts both Hackney's exceptionalism as a place where people do 'rub along' easily, and also his own minoritised status as 'a gay man'. By emphasising both his sexual identity and his personal commitment to and knowledge of Hackney a multicultural space ('I've lived in Hackney 30 years'), Andrew attempts to negotiate a safe space from which to talk about difficult aspects of diversity.

This position is not unproblematic, not least because it hints at what has been described as 'homonationalism' (Puar, 2007:39) or 'gay imperialism' where an 'artificially constructed gay v. Muslim divide, to contest sexual oppression in Muslim communities' means that 'homophobia is constructed as belonging to Islam', and that non-Muslim (implicitly white, Western Christian or secular) society is by implication exempt from confronting its own homophobia (Haritaworn et al, 2008:83). This resonates with a trend identified in narratives throughout this thesis, where understanding of local complexity (in this case, experiences of homophobia) are

positioned against assumptions of simplified elsewhere or others (in this case, religious mores). Yet Evan appeared to be aware of the risk of projecting one form of prejudice onto another out-group, firstly by noting that 'Britain' only 'supposedly' has 'general, liberal values' of tolerance; and secondly, by emphasising later that his wariness was more directed at the potential of *all* religion to discriminate against gay men and lesbians:

Hannah: My last question to everyone is whether you think that your particular background or identity affects how you think about cohesion?

Evan: Yes it does. It does. I mean the bit that, being gay, obviously, one is aware of if you like homophobic tendencies in other communities, particularly religious communities, and I'm not just talking about Judaism and Islam, I'm talking about Christianity as well... community leaders need to not just take the easy option, talk about communities that are visible... the lesbian community in Hackney, and the gay community has had a really strong influence in the way Hackney's developed over the last thirty years. And has helped to contribute to that openness and tolerance if you like, and what I'd hate to see, is that aspect of diversity being shut down to pacify certain other communities or parts of other communities, now it's not a blanket thing for me, I don't make assumptions that people are gonna be homophobic, but one is aware that certain fundamentalists do have particular views in all religious communities, and that makes me a bit nervous.

Again, it is 'being gay' which Evan identifies as making him most aware of discrimination, and which he identifies as emanating from elements of potentially all religious groups. Evan earlier mobilised his sexual identity (alongside his personal commitment to the locality) as a resource to demonstrate a particular form of sameness in difference from which it was possible to speak about conflict and diversity. In the second extract, 'being gay' is addressed more directly as a position in which he can be the victim of discrimination, and which informs his work on community cohesion by making him aware of the potential conflicts between the interests of different groups, but also of the subtleties of such conflict, which make assumptions on the basis of group membership unreliable.

This complexity is illustrated further in a final extract from the interview with Evan, in which he considers how other aspects of his identity and positioning – as a 'white middle class, pretty well off person' – mean he has a particular vantage point from which to value the experience of living in Hackney:

Evan: I'm aware of the irony of me as a white middle class, pretty well off person saying that, it's almost like saying you shouldn't encourage everybody to live well, but I do think one of the things about Hackney is that... it's provided an environment for people to experiment and to mix and to develop different ways of relating, which I think is quite difficult to do in a society that's more solid. More fixed, in a way. So it's the fluidity. It is tiring, and it is difficult, and there are times I think as one gets older, I think that probably one wants that kind of fixedness, but certainly for younger people in Hackney I think it's a fantastic environment, because you've got all those different influences.

Evan ends this extract by suggesting that his own relationship to the challenges and delights of living in Hackney might have changed with age. In this part of the interview, Evan was reflecting on his privileged position in terms of race and class which enabled him to opt in and out of being part of Hackney. His awareness of 'the irony' of celebrating the difficulties of life in Hackney as the grounds on which tolerance and mixing are built is that he does not have to confront many of these difficulties in his daily life, or can choose not to (particularly as he gets older) where others cannot (Bell and Binnie, 2000:105; Reay et al, 2007). This does not negate the fact that in other contexts and moments, other aspects of Evan's identity can lead to him being threatened and marginalised in ways that are harder to avoid.

### ***Choosing the margins?***

Some interviewees were even more explicit about how they moved in and out of 'marginality', selecting parts of their identity or biography to represent an association

with difference (Lury, 1998:1). Glen, a senior officer in Oldham, laughed when I asked him how he thought his own identity or background might affect how he thought about community cohesion issues, and said 'a week ago I would have answered that a bit differently'. In the past week he had discovered ancestors who had been 'very active on interethnic and interfaith issues' in previous centuries, 'a strong tradition of serving the community and work in public service' in his family, which he now thought was 'part of the reason why I've ended up in this job' because of 'values that have come down through my parents and my family'. I asked what he thought his answer might have been before he knew this history, and he said 'the bit about values would have been the same' but now he had 'the feeling that what I'm doing fit[s] so well with what some of my forebears did'. Unlike Donald, who (earlier in this chapter) explained the connections between his religious inheritance and political beliefs as coincidence, Glen chose to present his ancestry as a back-dated explanation of his values.

Phil, who had a very similar senior local authority role to Glen but in Barking and Dagenham, was also in the process of researching his family tree, and related this to the way he thought about community cohesion. The question I actually asked Phil was 'how you felt your own life experience affects how you think about these issues?' and he replied that 'it affects me totally' and explained that he grew up in London. But this was only mentioned very briefly before he began to discuss his current research into his family, which included migration histories on both his mother and father's sides, taking in India, Poland and Russia and intertwined with histories of British colonialism and European anti-semitism: 'so it's those experiences of being displaced, being in a place where you're not necessarily part of the accepted community has very much shaped my identity and upbringing'. Phil had known about his diasporic family history already, but was trying to find more information about the details and to trace earlier generations.

Both Glen and Phil suggested that their genealogies had formed their attitudes to cohesion and related issues through the perspectives imparted to them by their parents – in Glen's case, values of serving the community; in Phil's a sense of being out of place and sensitive to difference and inequality. Yet they both reinforced their claims

to these perspectives by reference to their ancestry. They present their bonds of inherited identity as if these will be more authentic claims to understanding questions of marginality than their own observations or embodied experiences. Yet drawing on their genealogies is a choice; neither Glen nor Phil's historic identifications are marked as visible to others. Their family trees are drawn on as a tool to negotiate entry to the ranks of the authentically marginal.

Ellen, a local authority officer in Hackney, described a different relationship to her family history in answer to this question:

Hannah: My final question to everyone was whether you think that how you think about cohesion is affected by your background? In particular.

Ellen: Oh – hoo! [laughs]

Hannah: [laughs] and it could be -

Ellen: Ooh. How I think about cohesion is affected by my, erm. No. I don't think so... Other than that maybe I've taken a direct path away from perhaps the values of my parents and grandparents. I think it is a generational thing and I think if you spoke to my parents they might talk about people using different words than I would certainly use... that's how it was then... But one of the reasons I left Essex was... I had a 360 degree feedback and the only criticism of my performance was about a lack of understanding of other communities. And that's because I lived, worked in a white middle class area, you never saw somebody that wasn't white, you didn't see many people who were poor people, quite frankly. And that was one of the reasons I took a definite decision to come to somewhere like Hackney where I knew it would be very different, and that's one of the reasons I really like Hackney.

Ellen suggests that in contrast to Glen, Phil and other interviewees discussed in this chapter, her family's values contrasted with her own attitudes to difference, inequality and belonging. If anything, she suggests her values were formed in direct opposition to those of her parents and grandparents. She then describes explicitly making a commitment to choosing difference, in the sense that she moved to work in Hackney precisely because it contrasted with her existing understanding and experiences of

work and personal life – and she reinforces that this is a personal alignment with her statement 'that's one of the reasons I really like Hackney'. An important contrast here with the work being done by Phil and Glen to situate themselves as marginal in their accounts is that they suggest this positioning is secure and authentic because of its inheritance from their families; they do not express it as a choice. Ellen, on the other hand, makes a claim to an affinity with marginality precisely because she has made an active choice.

A joint interview with Karen and Angela in Hackney brings into sharper focus the questions of choosing, who gets to choose, and what the consequences of choosing 'the margin' are. Both worked for the local authority; Angela was Karen's manager.

Karen: I think Hackney schools are a fantastic example of cohesion.

Hannah: Mmhm.

Karen: When it works well, you have got a classroom of thirty pupils from real diverse backgrounds and certainly my own children having been brought up in Hackney, had just such great experiences of primary education, they met children from a vast range of cultures, and there were tensions and differences, but things were worked through.

Angela: But I think with that, having [been] someone who's been kind of born and brought up here, and been in school what is quite telling is that within the school environment those relationships tend to be good, I think the measure is if you were doing a longitudinal study, if you go back ten, twenty years after people have gone through the schooling system are they still in close relationships with people from other communities?

Hannah: Yeah

Karen: Mm.

Angela: And very often... they're not [all laugh] erm.

Karen: Yeah... I think it would be really interesting to do the sort of thing that Angela talks about, taking the temperature now, and then looking forward, because I remember reading an interview with Doreen Lawrence, and she was saying the boys who attacked and killed Stephen were brought up in this multicultural area, so what's going wrong? And I remember that really struck



me, that my own experience is a really positive one, and you like to think that other people have the same openness, but we know there are both extreme groups but also extreme opinions.

Karen first of all establishes her commitment to both the borough of Hackney, and to being part of its diversity by living there and educating her children at local schools. But Angela draws attention to the limits of the claims that Karen can make, by suggesting that as someone who attended local schools herself (rather than making the choice to send her children there, as Karen has) the more long-term experience of diversity and equality may not be so rosy – that many people do lose the friends who are from 'other communities' as they get older. This interchange is inflected not just by the class privilege involved in Karen's choice to send her children to local schools as a middle class mother able to provide cultural capital to support their educational success while providing them with the 'multicultural capital' of familiarity with diversity (see Crozier et al, 2008; Haylett, 2001:365; Reay, 2008; Skeggs, 2005a:971). Karen is white and Angela is black, and their speaking positions are also refracted through this aspect of their structural positioning. This is highlighted when Karen reacts to Angela's comments about different experiences of schooling by talking about an instance where it 'really struck' her that her own positive experience might be particular, relating her thoughts about the history of the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence.<sup>66</sup> Thus Karen acknowledges, after the indirect prompting from Angela, that both her whiteness and her class position<sup>67</sup> are particular, and perhaps do not give her the authentically and authoritatively marginal position she first claimed.

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<sup>66</sup> See Chapter Three.

<sup>67</sup> 'What went so wrong' for the (white) boys who killed Stephen might be something to do with their class position, meaning that they experienced growing up in inner London less as a cultural resource and more as a process of marginalisation and demonisation (see Haylett, 2001:365; Hewitt, 2005:121-30).

***'Cohesion's for everybody'***

Angela: And so I think what the cohesion agenda does is allow people to park their differences for however long they want to park them with a view to the common good, cos this is about the value benefit for everybody whereas when you talk about social inclusion you can opt out of that, you can say well actually they're the ones who need to be included and I'm fine... so it's not about me, it's about them. And when you talk about multiculturalism again it's another issue, it's about 'them', whereas the benefit around community cohesion is that of all of the agendas it's the most inclusive cos everybody has a personal stake in it.

For some practitioners, community cohesion policy offered the possibility of at once acknowledging difference and inequality, and removing the need to talk about it altogether. Angela, who I also quoted above in the joint interview with Karen, argued that the opportunity to put differences (or difficult subjects) to one side and instead focus on commonality was an advantage of the concept of community cohesion policy. She suggests that discussions of community around social inclusion or multiculturalism have become too associated with 'otherness', and that she sees an opportunity for community cohesion policy to be interpreted as being about 'the common good'. There have of course been attempts to promote both social inclusion and multiculturalism as universally inclusive as well as critiques of them for reverting to a focus on a reified 'other' – a critique which has equally been made elsewhere to applications of community cohesion (Alexander, 2007:124-5; Levitas, 2005; Robinson, 2008; see also Chapter Three). Angela says that community cohesion does not let anyone off the hook, because it is about inclusive community, about everyone – including those who might otherwise be seen as unproblematic. But it is not clear from Angela's statement what she then imagines 'the cohesion agenda' to be, what it aims to achieve. If it is to 'allow people to park their differences' to come together (temporarily) for the 'common good', what becomes of the 'common good' when those differences are picked up again?

Ruth, who worked on policy issues in Hackney, presented a congruent analysis of the

workings of community cohesion rhetoric – but she was more sceptical about its progressive potential. Considering the extent to which the language of 'community cohesion' might be a way of avoiding talking directly about questions of class or of race, Ruth said:

Ruth: It's more comfortable, if you're a white middle class person, talking about cohesion... because it's about people getting on, whereas if you're that same person, talking about race equality and race justice, it's much more obvious that you're not on the receiving end of injustice and race hate and all those sorts of things,

Hannah: yeah

Ruth: so your position, your ability to talk about those issues, is [pause] questionable... I used to think that also with human rights, a little bit... human rights [representation at meetings] was often white middle class people. And it's cos it's an arbitrating concept about reconciling the competing interests... there's something about it which is a little bit neutral, it's not about a struggle, or it should be, but it's not... whereas I think issues around specific equality, and injustice, is much more toothy and political... these kind of cross cutting discourses... everybody together, all citizens, they kind of neutralise that, they kind of slightly cover up the kind of real injustice that people face. Every day.

Hannah: Yeah. And you think that's also easy for some people to talk about?

Ruth: Yeah, it's easier for me to talk about,

Hannah: Yeah [both laugh]

Ruth: people don't say who are you to talk about cohesion, cos cohesion's for everybody, you know... whereas if I was to stand up and start saying, I'm doing strategy on race equality... I don't think that would be quite such a comfortable position to be in.

Ruth describes how the apparent neutrality of concepts like community cohesion and human rights, which are about 'everybody together' 'cover up the kind of real injustice that people face'. She, personally, finds it 'easier to talk about' community cohesion because this vocabulary does not require her to expose her own privilege as a 'white middle class person'. Unlike Angela, Ruth doesn't seem to be saying that this neutrality

or comfort is a good thing; she is expressing concern that 'injustice that people face every day' might be neglected. Ruth also suggests that not being 'on the receiving end of injustice' might make one's ability to talk about those things 'questionable'. Here she reverts to an idea of the politics of authenticity which suggests that for her to challenge injustice as a privileged subject would be not only uncomfortable, but impossible. Yet in this conversation, Ruth is putting herself back into an uncomfortable position by acknowledging not only her race and class privilege, but that even her professional work intended to address this privilege is embedded in, and reinforces, existing structures. It is possible to experience a disjuncture of belonging even when objectively privileged (Christie, 2006; Hoggett et al, 2006; Puwar, 2004:131).

Rachel, who we met in the thesis introduction and who worked as a senior service manager in Hackney, took a position that was almost a mirror image of Ruth's. Ruth sees herself as embedded in structures of inequality and in that respect part of the problem, and yet (and therefore) able to hide behind structures of invisibility. Rachel, on the other hand, described her home and family life as embedded in an almost 'picture perfect' narrative of urban multiculturalism – and yet instinctively separated this from her work within the paradigms of community cohesion and social care.<sup>68</sup>

Hannah: Do you think your background or identity affects how you think about cohesion?

Rachel: God it must do. It must do! I suppose I think that it's not really about me, you know that it's something other... we talk about communities... I probably think about ethnic minority communities, and people who are poor... And it's something other, to me... something that I watch rather than partake. Although actually, that's just so not true, I mean for me personally.

Even when she surprised herself by reflecting on how her own life – in a religiously and ethnically mixed area, with her mixed race children with her female partner, where neighbours respected one another's difference and looked out for one another's welfare – could fit into narratives of community cohesion as a subject of policy, Rachel

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<sup>68</sup> We met Rachel initially in the Introduction to the thesis.

insisted that not just her class but her specific *professional* status marked her out (or rather, made her invisible) as not a subject but a practitioner of policy:

Rachel: And I suppose it's different for people that are in professional worlds because so much of my work is about... very very vulnerable, very poor, high risk group of people... not that it's an attractive attribute, but it's seeing them as something other.

Rachel did, on reflection, point to ways in which her home life became visible in relation to policy and issues of difference, belonging and inequality (see also Hunter, 2003, 2005). She felt uncomfortable acknowledging this privilege (and with it facing up to her role in actively governing the selves of others). But she also said that in everyday practice, her home life seemed like a completely different – or invisible – realm. This is different to saying that her personal identity and experiences did not influence her practice, of course. The point is that the technology of community cohesion policy suggests it is relevant to everybody, but does not actually undermine the power relations of governing which lead Rachel to see herself instinctively as set apart from populations to be governed.

***'Think about it on a human level'***

Yet it was not only interviewees relating experiences of direct discrimination against themselves who expressed personal and emotional commitments to an understanding of context-laden complexity and power-struggle (see Nayak, 2007:70; Sayer, 2005:40). My final two examples here are Erin, a service manager in Peterborough, and Sally, a voluntary sector manager in Hackney. Both talked about experiences that informed their commitments and ethics, drawn from their observations in both their work and their personal lives, which became intertwined:

Hannah: ... whether you think your own identity and background affect how you

think about cohesion?

Erin: [dramatic intake of breath] That's a good one! Yeah, my father was a big trade unionist and... you know that famous poem, first they came for the Jews [coughs] he used to carry that everywhere on him, if you don't look out for your neighbour, how can you expect them to look out for you when you're in trouble, and ultimately when, trouble is there's nobody there... But he always said you question everything that you read and everything that you hear and everything that you see... So yes, my background, I've been very fortunate. Very fortunate to have been brought up with that... and when I was very young, well a teenager, I saw a black guy being beat up in the street by two white guys. And he was a friend of mine. You know you see that as a youngster, you don't forget it really. For no reason.

Erin here describes formative political influences of growing up in a household with a commitment to an ethic of social solidarity, which she credits with forming her political attitudes and providing her with an instinct to question received wisdom. When she says she has been 'very fortunate' with regard to her background, she seems to be referring to this political outlook. This differs from the more common tendency to relate my question directly to identity politics or class privilege. Erin then described witnessing a racist attack on her friend. Her account suggests that this was a formative moment in her understanding of power relations in society, though she did not elaborate on this as we were interrupted at that point by a phone call. The attack on Erin's friend was inexplicable – 'for no reason' – yet it happened, and she could see it was motivated by racism. Though Erin was not the subject of the attack, and she does not assume the position of victim or target of racism, she clearly felt the shock of this event strongly ('you see that as a youngster, you don't forget it really').

Erin went on to describe other incidents, this time in her working life, which had brought into focus for her the discrimination and violence faced by marginalised people, and which she herself felt as emotional, if not physical, pain. When she was working with asylum seekers:

Erin: I just was amazed about how badly they were treated, and the services that

were turning them away, without even asking them, cos they didn't speak English, telling them that they couldn't help them when they were entitled to things, and I'd sit and they'd lift up their shirts some of them and show me their torture... One of them had a diary that they'd drawn the pictures of their journey here and they all had photos of their families in their wallet and it was just heartbreak- and then you'd phone up somebody and they'd say well I'm not prepared to talk to them unless they bring somebody that speaks Eng- you know, it was just like, do you realise, this person's been, you know...

This extract captures Erin's shock and outrage, as well as her 'heartbreak' and disbelief at the lack of empathy of service providers who would not see her clients. Similarly, at another point when she had been working with unemployed young people, Erin had been struck by the racism they faced when unable to get a job interview simply as a result of their 'foreign-sounding' names, and she had resorted to arranging interviews for them using falsely 'English' names: 'I'm sat with people who didn't stand a chance. Just by nature of their name'. Given Erin's description of her upbringing which taught her to 'look out for your neighbour', it seems that these attacks on and humiliations of people she cared for were also felt as attacks on herself. Yet she does not make an identity claim to the margin, to belong to an essentialised category herself. Nor does she claim to know what these experiences felt like for those directly under attack. Rather, having 'sat with people who didn't stand a chance', Erin joins them in solidarity.

Sally, similarly, described an upbringing with politically involved parents, her 'dad had a kind of burning commitment to socialism – democratic socialism of course!' and both parents were very committed to education, which she connected to the 'left-ish' political commitments she and her siblings had in adult life. But again, like Erin, Sally explained this ethical and political commitment as a background which she connected with concrete experiences in her life, though they might not have been experiences that impacted directly on her:

Sally: This goes for my husband as well, most of the rest of our families are working class. And so we're still in touch with working class roots that a lot of people in our position – Labour Party people – are not in touch with, and I

think gives me a totally different perspective... The fact that three members of [our] family, when the minimum wage was introduced, received increases of 50% in what they earned. And so people say oh, the minimum wage, what does that mean, that's what it means. The money that's gone into schools and health service, what has that meant? Because I think if you're middle class and London based, you get a very different picture... it also means that when I talk to family members who are openly racist I'm able to say, You may say, people come over here from Africa and they get everything but there are people living across from where I work, N families to a flat, women who've been deserted by the fathers of their children, who've brought them over here, who find themselves in a very difficult situation cos they don't have any legal status here any more and, etc., etc. Just think about that. Just think about what you'd be like in those circumstances... Think about it on a human level.

Sally describes two instances in which witnessing the struggles and triumphs of others (who are less privileged than her) gives her a perspective from which she speaks, not necessarily on their behalf, but with a knowledge that challenges people who are otherwise close to her position – whether 'middle class and London based' or 'family members'. Though it is a difficult and uncomfortable line to walk, I don't think that either Erin or Sally are here taking the role of 'the institutional interlocutor who frames the self of the subaltern' (Skeggs, 2004:126). Rather, they use as a resource not the experiences of others, but their own experiences of coming into contact with others' experiences. In this they recognise implicitly their (race and class) privilege but also choose to ally themselves with others who are under direct attack from this privilege. Indeed, as Skeggs points out, 'narrativization of one's experience is a resource; some are unable to present themselves as the subject of narrative' (2004:126) – yet this does not necessarily mean that the most progressive course of action for those who do have this resource is to relinquish it. Rather, like Erin and Sally seem to be (giving an account of) doing here, they can also try to find ways of putting this reflexivity to use in the service of addressing power inequalities (Skeggs, 2002:369).



## ***Conclusions***

Interviewees whose accounts showed the most potential for developing an approach to difference which neither reified nor ignored constructed identity categories and power differentials were those whose accounts suggested a sociological imagination; that is to say, 'the capacity to shift from one perspective to another... to range from the most impersonal and remote transformation to the most intimate features of the human self – and to see the relations between the two' (Mills, 1999 [1959]:7).

Hunter argues that 'failure to reach resolution can be read as a strength, rather than a weakness' (2010:469) when contemplating such encounters. There is a parallel here with Sara Ahmed's celebration of the 'killjoy feminist' as the rupturer of consensus, the voice which draws attention to the oppressive or objectionable contents of a conversation or practice and thereby is seen as a negative presence herself (2010:582). Ahmed also argues that opening up, and keeping open, areas of vulnerability and difficulty is a progressive move:

Struggling against racism means being willing to labor over sore points. Not only do we need to labor our points, as a laboring over sore points, but we also might even need to stay as sore as our points (Ahmed, 2010:591).

What Ahmed does not address in her discussion of the killjoy feminist is the ongoing argument over the privilege of being able to speak, and to be heard (though she considers this at length elsewhere – see Ahmed, 2000:55-74). For the other discussions cited here though, and for many of my research participants, the awareness of their own privileged status is present, but can have a paralysing effect – the risk of being 'destined to suffer because she feels deeply about the injustice of a political system which she is powerless to change' (Ware, 1992:232). Similarly, Srivastava, in her examination of the possibilities for anti-racist feminism, argues that a predominant strain of anti-racist feminism has become focused on the production of a virtuous anti-racist self. This results in dilemmas about how to present oneself as a white anti-racist

feminist:

If she were to say with complete ease 'I am racist'... she risks criticisms that she is complacent or glib about racism. If she were to outright deny being racist, she knows she would be stuck in an unacceptable ethical position (2005:53).

Srivastava argues that this dilemma, and the preoccupation with the creation and presentation of an ethical self, becomes an obstacle to institutional progress towards anti-racist goals. She suggests that a more productive approach would be to upset the apparent certainties of a dichotomous choice of 'innocence versus evil, knowledge versus ignorance' (58) and instead recognise the possibility of a less settled position, 'more interested in why antiracist change is not happening and less interested in her own moral acceptability' – whilst still acknowledging that 'individual preoccupations... may impede that work' (57). This potentially uncomfortable position, between acknowledging a situated, limited and compromised standpoint, and trying to move beyond this acknowledgement to intervention, is one I found many research participants to be experiencing (see also Keith, 2008b; Mayo et al, 2007). Processes of governmentality encourage policy practitioners to behave (and feel) in appropriate ways in their professional, as well as personal, lives. The continual pull to be 'neutral' or to have a fixed, correct position mitigates against attempts to retain ambiguity and 'sore points' or uncomfortable positions, which might involve stepping into the margins or challenging the power inequalities that underlie marginalisation.

## Chapter Eight: Thinking Inside the Box

### *Introduction*

This chapter brings together the major themes developed throughout the thesis, demonstrating how policy practitioners negotiate difficult subjects, by taking up uncomfortable positions. Sometimes they attempt to make these positions more comfortable, but often this results in new discomforts. My research has considered policy practitioners working in and with local government. The questions I asked of them, and the responses they gave, ranged across a wide variety of subjects but they all led away from, or back to, community cohesion policy and its negotiations; and ideas of belonging, identity, and inequality. These are subjects that research participants encountered and lived in other aspects of their lives, not just professionally. This was reflected in the way that many of them talked about community cohesion policy in research interviews. In this chapter I will emphasise four broad findings from my research, partly by considering new artefacts; in analysing them, I draw together observations, analysis and original contributions to knowledge from throughout the thesis.

Firstly, the practice of policy in the government worlds I investigated consisted of ongoing ethical negotiations between individual and collective responsibility, and between individual choice and collective norms. Community cohesion policy, as I have demonstrated, is concerned with *enabling citizens to behave in appropriate ways* (which of course entails the unspoken question of who determines what is appropriate). It is about government finding ways for 'difficult subjects' to make *themselves* less difficult. I have used the framework of governmentality, but my original contribution has been to emphasise that the policy practitioners I am researching are both governing others through techniques of governmentality (that is, finding ways to encourage populations to regulate themselves) *and* are subject to regimes of governmentality (that is, they also seek to regulate themselves in line with norms outside of themselves). Importantly for the perspective of this study, governing

through governmentality (conducting the conduct of conduct) is a practice and a process itself. It involves individuals taking decisions within regimes of power and truth. Those regimes help to form individual selves; individuals are able to amend regimes through their actions to differing extents; and, importantly, they are also (made to feel) responsible for these regimes of truth and what changes they make do not make within them.

The second point I want to make is that community cohesion policy easily slips into a language of 'celebrating diversity' without necessarily considering *why* some types of difference are seen as important while others are not, and what power relations lie behind (and result from) that. This can have the effect of assuming that 'diversity' is banal, unproblematic and shared – without addressing inequalities and discrimination. This research was conducted in a period of structural, political, economic and social change and multiple, unpredictable shifts in the ways that government and individuals considered 'community', 'cohesion', 'belonging', 'identity' and 'inequality'. Discussions of these subjects at the beginning of the twenty-first century often cite changing technology and the consequent ease of global travel, communication and commerce as challenging long-standing (senses of) locally-rooted communities (e.g. see MacKinnon et al, 2011). As we have seen, such developments, most especially international migration, were very relevant to the ways that policy practitioners I interviewed constructed narratives about the need for and achievement of community cohesion. Yet there is a more specific question, I think, about the development of 'super-diversity' in populations. This is pertinent to, but goes beyond migration status, racial or ethnic categories, and associated inequalities. It is a question about what types of 'difference' are made visible – most often, as we have seen, connected to race, ethnicity and religion – and what types of 'difference' remain invisible or are silenced. My focus has been on the processes whereby forms of difference are created or silences in the narratives of policy practitioners. When difference or diversity is identified (whether to be regarded with suspicion or celebration) without attention to power relations this creates new uncomfortable positions which complicate 'community cohesion' further. Equally, recognising that differential power relations exist and that one is implicated in them can be uncomfortable for policy practitioners –

particularly where, despite their professional positions, they lack the means to address underlying structural inequalities. A variety of techniques were used to negotiate these discomforts by silencing inequalities; recognising but reincorporating power differences; or recognising them and trying to work within the discomforts they produced.

The third point I want to develop in this conclusion is how the role of local government is imagined by those narratives and voices that we have encountered throughout the thesis. Here I open the discussion further to consider how this is seen as both changing and staying the same through a variety of successive 'policy agendas' from shifting national government administrations. At the time of writing this conclusion, it seems the 'community cohesion' era may be coming to an end – perhaps to be replaced by David Cameron's 'Big Society' as a goal. The concepts are similarly slippery and capable of being recast in different moulds. Rather than trying to speculate too far on what might become of 'community cohesion' in the Big Society, I will consider instead how the policy practitioners I interviewed (before the election of the coalition government in 2010) anticipated change as a result of the global financial crisis and an expected new government (and how they reflected on change as a perennial process even with the same party in power). The question that concerned them was how, situated in their local area and in their professional roles, they would find ways to deliver the goals that they connected to community cohesion (or opposed to it) within whatever might come next. I will link these reflections to the way my findings throughout the thesis contribute to an understanding of the debates and practices that distance and question the 'proper' role of local government.

Finally, I want to conclude the chapter and the thesis by considering briefly where we might be taken by using Mills' lens of the sociological imagination and accepting that changing the world might involve some uncomfortable positions – positions which might depart from imagining academia as separate from 'the real world'. And I build on Mills' treatment of the sociological imagination by paying greater attention to the emotional and affective elements of imagination and the links that an emotional lens can either enable or obscure between the intimate and the global (see also Back,

2007b). The role of participant observer that I have taken in approaching this research has drawn out narratives which rely on emotional commitments to ideas, ideals, places and processes of governing. Recognising the role of emotion in governing belonging, identity and inequality is essential because power relations are experienced through emotional, embodied registers. That I have conducted this research as at once a social researcher and a policy practitioner has helped me to analyse the similarities and discontinuities between the two roles. It has also produced a precarious line for me to negotiate, as does any experience of participant observation, maintaining both intimacy with the research field and enough detachment to produce informed analysis. Including an analysis of the role of emotion in governing could be subjected to parallel criticisms, that emotional responses risk obscuring material inequalities. I agree that this is a risk and through this chapter (and the thesis) I reflect on a number of moments when this elision can be seen within negotiations of community cohesion policy. But I conclude that such risks, while serious, should not prevent us from attempting to find ways of practising public sociology that intervene in society – and in doing so it is important to recognise how affective commitments interact with structural power relations, sometimes in unexpected or contradictory ways.

### ***'Building people'***

A research participant and former colleague who works on cohesion policy tells me she has something for me that I might find interesting, something she picked up at a recent practitioner training event about community cohesion. She hands me a small tin, 6 cm by 6 cm by 2 cm. It doesn't weigh very much, and it has a hinged lid, like something that might contain mints, or an old-fashioned cigarette tin. But the lid shows a government crest and the words *Government Office for London*. Underneath that, in block capitals, it asks '*What is Community Cohesion?*'. Perhaps the answer is inside the box.

I open the box and am presented, not with cigarettes or mints, but with a USB stick displaying the same logo and the same question. It is held within protective foam like a piece of jewellery might be. It invites me to discover the answer to its question, by plugging it into my computer

to see what happens. Will I find out the answer to this question?

What I find is a film lasting 6 and a half minutes. It begins with a statement from Hazel Blears MP, then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, with responsibility for community cohesion. She stands in a computer generated landscape with a silhouette of the London skyline in the background. Between Blears and the horizon there is a screen-within-a-screen, on which play images of (I suppose) community cohesion. Blears explains what she thinks community cohesion means and why she thinks it is important:

*Community cohesion's really important to me in the work that I do in the Department, because it's really about bringing people together, whatever their age, their race, their religion, and trying to really build on the shared values that people have, rather than concentrating on the differences between people. Everybody knows, if they live in a place where they feel comfortable, they feel at home, they know their neighbours, they feel that they share very much the same values as the people around them, but at the same time being able to celebrate the things that make them unique and different, and I think that community cohesion, particularly in a time of great change, is something that's really precious to us, and absolutely essential to building the kind of communities that we all want to see.*

We then hear what seem to be extracts from interviews with local authority workers, talking about what community cohesion means to them. Unlike Blears, who appeared as herself, the visual accompaniments to these voices are two-dimensional cartoon figures (see Figures 8.1 and 8.3). There are six of these avatars in the film (though there appear to be at least ten different voices), and they seem to represent 'diversity' in cartoon form. In order of appearance, there's an 'Asian man' in smart-casual shirt and trousers; a 'white woman' in a business suit and glasses with her hair pulled back severely; a 'young (Asian?) Muslim woman' in a hijab and jeans; another 'white woman' in jeans and t-shirt; an 'African-Caribbean woman' wearing sandals and carrying a shopping bag; and a stocky 'white man' in shorts, t-shirt, sunglasses, a hat and a high visibility jacket. They hold up cards with various words extracted from the voice-over, in the style of the Bob Dylan video to *Subterranean Homesick Blues* (Figure 8.1). The cards say:

*Building people; Relationships; Shared Understanding; Shared Belonging; YOUNG OLD (and then a line is drawn between 'YOUNG' and 'OLD' saying 'understanding and dialogue'); Get to know each other; Three Major Stakeholders; Your ethnicity and my ethnicity living in harmony; We; Are; ALL; Stake Holders; Police; Health; Housing; Perception of Services; Your Community; Different Understanding; Appropriate Language; that's the language they talk; Services; No One Understands Me; Community Cohesion is...; Love; Respect; Understanding.*



*Figure 8.1*

In between the sign saying 'No One Understands Me' and the one saying 'Community Cohesion is...', the woman in a suit holds a card with a schematic female figure who in turn holds a placard reading 'I am responsible'; then in the rest of the placard four more stick figures (two male and two female) appear, holding a sign saying 'So are we' (see Figure 8.2).



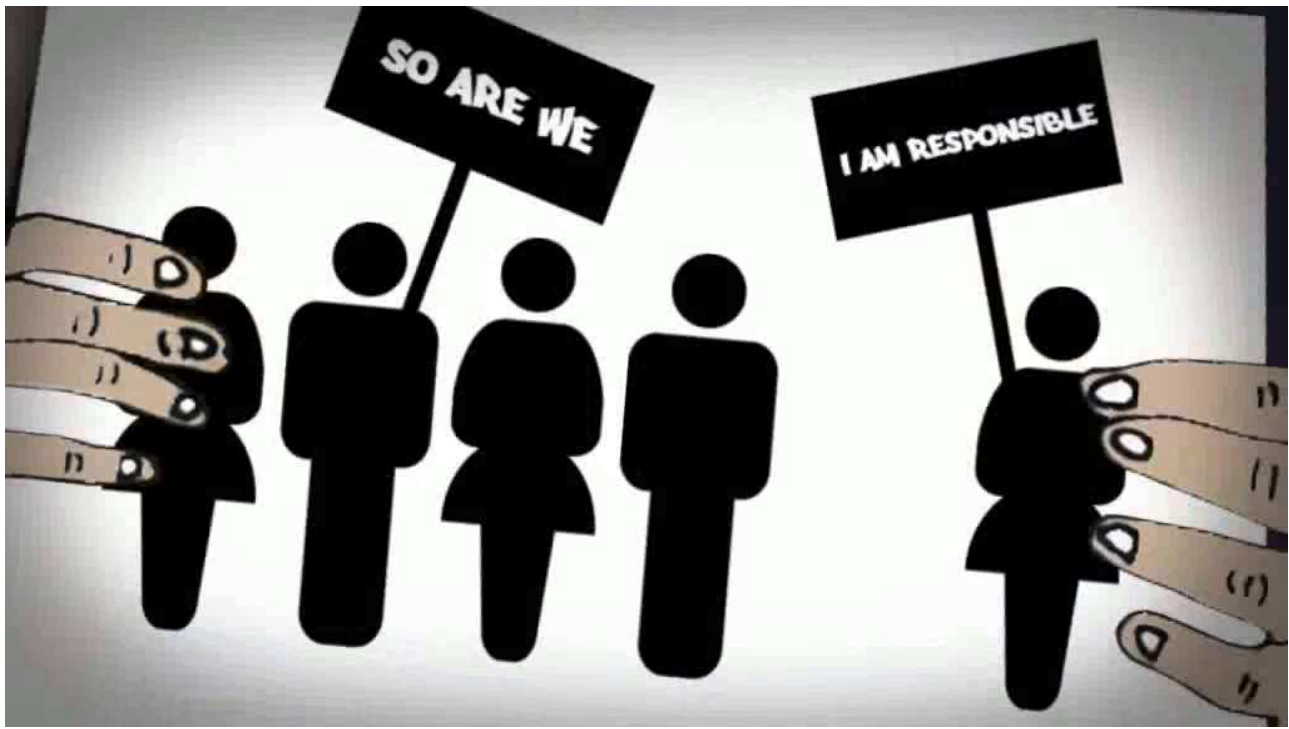


Figure 8.2

Over these visuals, a woman's voice explains: 'it's not the responsibility of someone sitting in the centre, it's the responsibility of everybody who delivers services and also all residents as well'. The last thing we hear is a man saying: 'if we spend time trying to understand people and deliver the services that they want, then what we will find is that we will get the cohesion that we're looking for. Because it's about relationships'. Then the music plays out to an image of the six avatars standing together holding blank pieces of paper (see Figure 8.3). Perhaps now it is over to you, the viewer to fill them in? Or is this the answer to *what is community cohesion?*<sup>69</sup>

<sup>69</sup> The video is available online at <http://vimeo.com/2981426> [last accessed 28<sup>th</sup> May 2011].



*Figure 8.3*

If we treat this film as a text in itself, there is ample material to analyse its construction of community cohesion as a 'thing' which can be defined (without actually providing any clear definition anywhere in the text). As I explored in Chapter Three, there are multiple narratives, meanings and resonances of community cohesion. This applies whether conceptualising 'community cohesion' as an observable state of populations; as a goal to be achieved or worked towards; or as a set of policy proposals and techniques. The voices in the film seem to be discussing techniques designed to achieve community cohesion, *and* the observable state of community cohesion; these two senses of the term overlap as they do in many such discussions. However, very few of the narratives which I drew out in Chapter Three from more traditional policy documents and discourses appear explicitly in this film. There is no reference to 'tension', 'riots', 'violence'; there is no discussion of 'discrimination', 'equality' or 'extremism'; there is no mention of the specificity of local place. There is very limited reference to migration – the only specific example of what cohesion might mean at the level of interaction is a statement that 'for some people community cohesion is about different ethnicities and how they get on together. A group that people often look at is refugees, and they see the need for refugees to integrate into life with other

Londoners', but what this might mean is not explored. Another speaker says that refugees are her clients, and one set of 'stakeholders' in community cohesion; the other two groups of stakeholders she cites are people working in service delivery, and 'the general public'.

Economic inequality is only mentioned in the film very fleetingly – there is a statement that 'there are examples of very successful areas which have high levels of deprivation but also have high levels of cohesion'. The only connection between community cohesion and questions of inequality or discrimination in this presentation is when a voice accompanying the woman in the suit suggests that 'your perceptions of who's getting what' from local housing services could impact on community cohesion. The implication is that the group seen to be getting more (or the group feeling hard done by) is defined on ethnic or racial lines. This example also demonstrates an unspoken class bias in who is made a concern for community cohesion policy: principally people who live in social housing. 'Services' are mentioned but only in relation to people's *perceptions* about how services are delivered, and whether they *feel* they are being treated fairly. This is a narrative of community cohesion as a policy to manage residents' feelings about how they are treated, not about whether they actually *are* being treated differently. The overwhelming answer this video gives to the question 'what is community cohesion?', is encapsulated by Hazel Blears' statement at the beginning: it's about 'trying to really build on the shared values that people have, rather than concentrating on the differences between people'. This is reflected in the voice-overs and the way they are summarised in the captions I listed above; all of these focus on affective relationships.

The video presents a narrative that can be understood in relation to those in Chapter Three, but which does not directly refer to the histories or relationships implicated in those narratives. The concept of community cohesion is presented as free-floating, unattached to particular events or places. Tensions, conflicts, and the inequalities which provoked them are absorbed into a discussion of diversity and acceptance or celebration of difference. What is more, this diversity is literally embodied in the narrators of this film. The six cartoon figures each represent an archetype of diversity

based on a set of simplified visual clues that place them as having specific ethnic, gender, religious and professional statuses. Most interesting, perhaps, is the figure of the white man in outdoor clothing including shorts and a high visibility jacket. Although there is no explanation in the video of who the speakers are, their comments suggest that they are practitioners who work in community cohesion policy in various guises. This man in his outdoor work-wear seems to represent an 'identity group' which is not included in the other visual representations of the video (the white working class male) while it is unclear what role his outfit suggests as a community cohesion worker. That at least ten different voices accompany the six avatars suggests that they are not simply representations of the speakers, but that the voices we hear have been amalgamated into this collage of professional diversity. The personal backgrounds, identity or status of the voices or their visual avatars are not mentioned at all in the script of the film. Yet the way the figures have been differentiated and physical clues to status have been distributed suggests that there is a level at which their personal identities are important.

The first sign saying 'Building people' makes an analysis of the film as a tool of governmentality via affect almost too obvious. The end of the film, where the principles of cohesion are described as 'love', 'trust' (which doesn't receive a caption), 'respect' and 'understanding', drives home this presentation of community cohesion as a policy which aims to manage populations through their emotional responses. But it also suggests that the role of the policy practitioner (the neutral bureaucrat?) is not just to find ways to manage the emotions of populations. The practitioner must engage in these emotional *relationships* with those populations; love, trust, respect and understanding all carry the implication of a two-way relationship and commitment. This resonates with Emma's comments about the impossibility of the role of the neutral yet reflective policy practitioner in Chapter Seven: 'you need to be totally objective, but you can't be'.

Thus the practitioner must embody difference, and perform love and relationships. The sign in Figure 8.2 makes it clear that not only is community cohesion a form of governmentality in which individuals must take responsibility for themselves and

behave in ways which embrace 'shared values' and 'celebrate difference'; it is a framework of governmentality in which the governors themselves are expressly subject to these same requirements of self-monitoring and performance of personal attributes. This is not quite the 'evacuation of subjectivity through the policy construction of cardboard cut-out characterizations... that runs across the struggle over citizenship between those who govern and those who are governed' that Gail Lewis describes (2005:538) since here the 'cardboard cut-outs' are at once those who govern *and* those being governed.

Yet it remains a contradictory relationship. It is clear that *some* individuals and groups are expected to perform community cohesion more ardently, because they are the (often unspoken) examples of potentially problematic difference which supposedly we all embody. A very clear example of this was the demand that Muslim people demonstrate antipathy to terrorism and commitment to 'the wider community' through the Preventing Violent Extremism programme, discussed in Chapter Four. The 'everybody' whose values are shared echoes Jacqui Smith's comment (quoted in Chapter Five) that to walk down the street alone in Hackney after midnight was 'just not something people do'. In Chapter Seven, Thomas's reference to 'urban environments where I feel comfortable' and Alice's preference for living in cities which are 'more interesting' than elsewhere, echo this treatment of a white, middle class self as a norm, even when this normative habitus is being described as 'comfortable' with difference. 'People' and 'everybody' are imagined in these statements as 'people like' the speaker; and indeed if the values and experiences which they refer to *were* universal, there would presumably be no need for community cohesion policy to be addressed at all. The places experienced by this 'everybody' are in turn 'comfortable' or to be avoided, in relation to a normative white middle class self.

The production of the film itself is an act of governmentality, as through its design and performance those involved present themselves as embodiments of good practice in administering and engaging in cohesion. The film is both made by and aimed at policy practitioners, and it features policy practitioners, both promoting themselves as performing appropriate normative behaviours, and helping to regulate the behaviour

of colleagues – who will in turn use these lessons in the management of populations. As I considered in Chapter Two, 'Good Practice' can be critiqued as a technique for reincorporating reflexivity into practice in a way that reinforces normative behaviours and shuts down critique (e.g. Strathern, 2006:200). This may indeed be what is happening in the production and dissemination of this video. However, the methodological approach I have taken, and much of the practice which I have discussed, have aimed to find ways of understanding 'good practice' as an opportunity to keep open critical inquiry; to continue to negotiate uncomfortable positions and find new ways to approach difficult subjects. Though this more open approach is not presented in the film, it is a central question for how to negotiate ethical policy practice (in the sense of unstable, ongoing negotiation and questioning – see Back, 2007b:114). In the next section, I consider a specific example of how the uncomfortable overlaps between professional and personal roles can be experienced, and the different ways this can be understood when thinking through a sociological imagination which recognises the links between personal actions and experiences, and structural power dynamics.

### ***'My existence is under threat'***

Hannah: So I just wondered if your own background and identity and experience affect how you approach these issues?

Jack: Totally, one hundred and ten per cent... Every day, when I think about community cohesion, I can honestly say I challenge myself... people tell you all the time, that they're not racists... now I've just got one question for those people and that's how do you know? How do you know you're not a racist cos how the hell do you tell that? When you talk about communities so, I live in Barking. I've always lived in Barking except for when I was at [university]... I am a Barking boy. My whole town has completely and utterly and totally changed. Doesn't look the same, smell the same, feel the same... This afternoon, I will put my house on the market to sell it to move... So then when you think about that in terms of your own personal experience well,

what's that all about? Why do I wanna do that, why do I wanna move?... And I suppose it's about [pause] for me [pause] and my experiences of community cohesion [pause] my community no longer exists... They're all part of the white flight, bang, they've all gone... So all my friends have gone, I'm the last man standing, that's what they say... and something, when I've been dealing with [my work] that I've thought about a lot is [pause] cos essentially where I am, what's happened is... my children are now a significant minority in their schools. I think my little boy is one of four white kids in his class that he's going into... We talk about understanding of and engagement with Muslim communities. Well, I'm a minority aren't I, where is the understanding and engagement with my community?

Jack asked for these comments to be anonymised further than others he made. I have removed some of the identifying features, and should point out simply that he was working on cohesion-related policy but *not* in Barking and Dagenham; that was simply where he lived. I did not include this material in the discussion of Barking and Dagenham because it is about a different relationship to the place from that I was discussing in the main – Jack is speaking as a local resident, about how his experiences as a policy practitioner have affected how he thinks about aspects of his home life. Though I asked Jack, as I asked others, whether he thought his own background affected how he thought about related issues, he seemed to be talking here about how his work affected the way he thought about issues troubling him in his life outside work. He described an unsettling feeling, that the area he had lived in all his life had changed, principally describing a change in the ethnic mix of the local population as new residents moved in and previous (white) residents took flight into towns further outside London, into Essex. He described a sense of isolation – he was 'the last man standing' – the place he had grown up in, and 'the community', 'doesn't exist any more'. Having described feeling left behind by his friends and his community, Jack described how his children, as white children, were in a minority in their school. Adding emphasis to this, he told me of his shock when his son came home from school one day to tell him what he had learnt about Christmas:

Jack: What he said was, he said CHRISTIANS believe... And for me that's like –

that's a real check up... That is really hard for me to accept that. Not because [pause] I don't understand the fact that there are different faiths and different religions, but I kind of – expected, unconsciously, that my kids would be brought up in the same tradition that I was brought up in, collective acts of worship, this, that, and then when my son comes home, well Christians believe, so oh my god, don't say that when your nan's here because that will be it, that will be uproar over that... And I keep asking myself the same time, are you racist, is that what this is, are you actually a racist? And you think well, hang on a minute, I suppose the Asian community are coming together cos they wanna be together, why should it be any different for me?...

Hannah: And does that make you feel [pause] does that kind of make – help you understand how other communities are w- or is it making you feel-

Jack: No I think it makes me feel how communities may feel under threat... And attacked. And it's a terrible way to say it isn't it... but actually my way of living, my existence, is under threat, is under attack, it has been threatened.

Jack describes how his certainties about life and his place in the world have been shaken by changing circumstances in Barking and Dagenham. He has tried to think about this using the framework of community cohesion policy, as he understands it. In his account, the problem for him is not that his children have learnt about a range of different religions and cultures, or even that their school is ethnically mixed; it is that within this mix, his 'tradition' is no longer the norm. Nowhere in our conversation did he suggest that he had a strong religious faith (indeed if he had, one might suppose his son would already have some knowledge of Christian traditions including Christmas). What he described was identifying with Christianity as a default background faith. When he expected that his children would be brought up in 'the same tradition' as him, he meant 'collective acts of worship' at school – that is, a background of white (Protestant) Christian normativity within which they were unremarkable and 'normal'.

Jack's narrative has some similarities with the narratives of a dispossessed 'white working class' disturbed by rapid demographic and social change who turn to far-right voting patterns as a defence against economic and social upheaval they are not ready for, as a protest vote against their neglect by a liberal middle class elite, or as a



demonstration of their fundamentally xenophobic core. I discussed these narratives and the work they do in Chapter Three, and the work that policy practitioners do to understand, negotiate and reposition them (from within Barking and Dagenham specifically) in Chapter Six. Jack's narrative is not the same as those ideal types, however.

Firstly, he stated several times in the interview his strong antipathy towards the BNP ('I hate those bastards as much as anyone'), and he began the comments quoted here by referring to an ongoing struggle with himself over whether his feelings stemmed from unconscious or deep-seated racism – and reiterated this struggle later in the interview. Secondly, Jack is not 'white working class' at least in a material sense; while we did not discuss his class identification, he certainly cited aspects of his life (his university education and home ownership, as well as his professional position) which meant that the situation of powerlessness and marginalisation usually associated with the discourse of 'white working class' disillusionment was less pronounced.

Finally, and of course connected to these other two factors, Jack is speaking in relation to a professional role in which he had become accustomed to a particular form of 'diversity talk' and practice. That is, he is expressing feelings of isolation and discomfort with (ethnic demographic) change more usually understood within the narrative of a 'white working class' turning to the far right for refuge, but using his professional habitus he attempts to make sense of his experience in a version of community cohesion discourse which emphasises affect and bounded identities in lieu of power relations – a discourse bearing a strong relationship to that in the video discussed above. Here, the 'difficult subjects' of structural power relations and discrimination are rejected as subjects for community cohesion policy, and instead the elements of affective group belonging are emphasised as determining factors – which are shared by 'everybody'.

Jack's description of his experience emerged when I asked if his own background informed how he thought about community cohesion policy. His reply is eventually that, feeling 'under attack' by changes in the 'feel', 'look' and 'smell' of the area where

he has lived all his life, he is able to empathise with 'other communities' who may feel attacked. The 'threat' to Jack is not a physical attack. It is not clear what 'understanding and engagement' Jack feels is lacking for 'his' community. Nor is anyone removing his children's ability to learn about the traditions in which he grew up, in their schools. The threat is that this is no longer learnt about as necessarily the dominant tradition, but one among many. 'His' community no longer feels like his, 'doesn't exist any more' because he is not the one agreeing to 'tolerate' others (Lewis, 2005:540; Wemyss, 2006), but one of many being 'tolerated' by one another. He describes a loss of his 'community' but the population of Barking has not disappeared; it has changed.

An alternative way for him to view the situation might have been to find ways to adapt his own sense of what constituted 'his' community. What he has lost is a feeling of superiority and security that he didn't even realise he had, and which many people never have had. This resonates with analyses of post-colonial melancholia (Gilroy, 2001, 2004; see also Hewitt, 2005:131) which suggest that feelings of alienation such as those described by Jack arise from an unmet expectation of entitlement to power and privilege which Britain as a whole has suffered with the loss of Empire and the demise of British international influence, and which those subjects who identify themselves as embodying Britishness (or more specifically Englishness), most often white men, are most likely to experience.

By imagining this within a narrative of community cohesion policy which privileges affect, identity and belonging to bounded communities linked by 'tradition', Jack seems to be setting himself an impossible task. As his reflections demonstrate, he has not resolved his feelings within this or any other explanatory framework to his own satisfaction. Indeed, he has decided to exit the site of his immediate discomfort by moving his family out of Barking, but this decision makes him uncomfortable when he tries to understand it in the terms of his professional practice. His resolution appears to be that 'the Asian community are coming together' as are his (white English) Barking community (albeit in new locations outside of Barking) and that therefore a population living in ethnically differentiated 'communities' is acceptable. But as we have seen, the genesis of community cohesion policy was premised on such arrangements being

problematic, sometimes because of a recognition that they may be linked to or exacerbate structural inequalities, more often because such separation was seen to be caused by or increase discrimination and mistrust between communities so defined (see Chapter Three). Jack's narrative demonstrates some of the contradictions at the heart of community cohesion policy. By 'celebrating difference' without recognising that some differences are treated differently to others, one can simply reinforce difference and ignore inequalities of power.

Jack feels that he has become marginal, an outsider or at least less dominant; but thinking through community cohesion policy as a celebration of difference does not allow him to translate this feeling into solidarity with others who are marginalised in different ways and to different extents, but similar to him because they have felt excluded by power. In Chapter Seven, we saw how other policy practitioners' negotiations of these overlaps between personal and professional experiences and commitments could vary along with their understandings of their position within structural power relations. Thinking about one's role within the ethical negotiations of power as a policy practitioner does not necessarily make positions more comfortable; indeed, it can increase discomfort as one is forced to confront one's own privilege. Though some practitioners dealt with this by re-silencing such questions, others tried to practice a kind of public sociology by incorporating a sociological understanding of difference and power into the way they understood their work within government. Doing so might entail a recognition that there may not be a comfortable, neutral position from which to speak or act; but that words and action were necessary nonetheless.

This thesis contributes to an understanding of these positions, building on a developing literature that uses an affective lens to understand the practices in which policy practitioners engage when negotiating power, responsibility and personal commitments (e.g. Ahmed, 2007a; Hunter, 2003; Keith, 2008b; Mayo et al, 2007). My research contributes to this literature by engaging with the narratives and understandings of policy practitioners as they reflect on these negotiations and confront (or try to escape) the uncomfortable positions this can entail. In the next

section I will consider how the practice of attempting to reconcile these difficult subjects goes to the heart of questions about the role of government, and UK local government in particular.

### ***What is local government for (in the Big Society)?***

Hannah: Do you think cohesion's going to stay around as a big policy issue in the next few years?

Beverley: I think a great deal will depend on the change of government... if it's the same administration [laughing] then I'd expect it to continue. But if we had a change of administration, I think it would qualify in some way, partly because I think that Conservatives would have their commitment to reducing funding, and this is the kind of discretionary thing that could go. And of course some of the authorities that are doing excellent work in this field are Conservative authorities, but that doesn't mean quite the same thing as national government policy.

Hannah: And do you think that [community cohesion policy] will have a future, can you see where that might go?

Alison: Depends who gets elected of course. It's gonna be such a mysterious [both laugh] I don't know whether the Tories will hang on to the concept. They have a shadow communities minister, so that's - I think the terminology will inevitably will evolve, and change, and we'll talk about different things, but I think it will be a gradual shift if there is a shift, and I think we will continue to talk about the kinds of issues that are currently encapsulated under the umbrella term of community cohesion because I don't think local government can do its job in the current political, geopolitical, ideological environment, without having some way of talking about the diversity of their communities, and the widening class divide and the impact of the 'credit crunch'.

My fieldwork ended before the Conservative-Liberal Democrat national coalition

government took power in May 2010, and the thesis covers the way that community cohesion was understood in the years before that. But in many of the interviews and observations of policy events and discussions that I conducted, there was growing discussion about how an expected new government might have a different approach to issues connected to community cohesion policy. Impacts of the international financial crisis and the likely effect on public spending in Britain were anticipated, both for how communities lived, and how policies for promoting cohesion would be prioritised.

The two quotes above are from separate interviews with Beverley and Alison, who worked in similar roles in two different national-level local government lobbying organisations. They gave very similar answers to my question about what might happen to community cohesion as a policy agenda in the coming years. Indeed, both laughed wryly at the idea that there was any doubt that there would be change of national government at the forthcoming general election (I interviewed Alison in June 2008 and Beverley in April 2009). They both suggested that a new (Conservative) government was likely to 'qualify', 'evolve', 'change' or 'shift' the policy programme. Beverley suggests that a Conservative government might reduce community cohesion work because of a commitment to reduce public spending, a commitment which was becoming increasingly vocalised as global economic recession developed. Alison highlights the effects of recession as potentially a concern for community cohesion policy, when she suggests that growing economic inequality is one of the issues 'encapsulated' in the term.

Both suggest that despite their expectations of a change in terminology and focus, the issues that community cohesion connects to will continue to be political concerns. And both suggest that this is because the issues dealt with through community cohesion policy are central to the role of local government. Alison doesn't think local government 'can do its job... without having some way of talking about the diversity of their communities, and the widening class divide' and the impact of recession. Beverley points to a distinct role for local government, 'that doesn't mean quite the same thing as national government policy', when she discusses how in many cases Conservative-led authorities have pursued community cohesion as an agenda, while

their national party very rarely uses this language in publications, speeches or debates.<sup>70</sup> All main political parties champion 'localism' in various forms, arguing that decisions about places should be made by people who live in them (e.g. Cameron, 2010; Clegg, 2011; Miliband, 2006). Yet, as we saw in the negotiations between local and central government in Chapter Four, this does not necessarily translate into practice; local decisions are made within parameters set by central government. Indeed, as Beverley and Alison indicate, the predominant influence of the national political situation over what happens locally is not even up for discussion – even though they both lobby on behalf of local government, both suggest that local authorities are likely to alter their approaches to community cohesion policy with a change in national government, whether or not existing local approaches are seen as successful.

The close association between the purpose of local government and the practice of community cohesion policy which Beverley and Alison express has echoes elsewhere in my research. There are numerous examples throughout the thesis of how meanings and practices of community cohesion have been contradictory and contested. Perhaps less overtly, the meaning, purpose and practices of local government have also been put in question by the practitioners I interviewed and observed. This is most clearly exemplified in Chapter Four, where the extremely controversial language and design of the Preventing Violent Extremism programme provoked a clear division between many local government practitioners and their national government colleagues. That is not to say that there was a clear consensus from either group about what the role of (local) government should be – some, like the comments I quoted in Chapter Four from a television interview with the Leader of Bradford Council, emphasised service delivery, whilst some practitioners I interviewed argued there was a duty to 'bring people together'; some national narratives emphasised security whilst others suggested

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<sup>70</sup> Indeed, in attempting to interview right-leaning think tanks for my fieldwork, I contacted one of the Directors (who was also an elected councillor) of a think tank which framed itself as 'dedicated to issues related to local government and localism', and it became apparent that he was not rejecting the concept, as I had anticipated, but was not aware of the term at all. The organisation declined to take part in the research as they did not 'have sufficient expertise... on this subject, so may not be of any real value' (email dated 16 June 2009).

structural inequality should be a greater concern. The point is that the disagreements and negotiations were not simply about what community cohesion policy is, was, or should be, or whether it was a relevant or appropriate activity for local government. Within these arguments lay a deeper question of the purpose of democratic institutions, public services and administration; and of their *local* dimension in terms of responding to the needs of specific places and populations and the levers of power available to them. Community cohesion policy is one lens through which to contemplate these issues. As Beverley and Alison anticipated, the question of how to deliver community cohesion (whatever that might mean) has become less central to policy discussions *in those terms*. Yet questions of belonging, identity and inequality – and of the role and aims of government in asking and negotiating these questions – have by no means disappeared from the work of policy practitioners since the 2010 general election:

For a long time the way government has worked... has turned many motivated public sector workers into disillusioned, weary puppets of government targets... It has turned lively communities into dull, soulless clones of one another... So we need to turn government completely on its head... these are the three big strands of the Big Society agenda. First, social action... [G]overnment... must foster and support a new culture of voluntarism, philanthropy, social action. Second, public service reform... we've got [to] give professionals much more freedom, and open up public services to new providers like charities, social enterprises and private companies... And third, community empowerment. We need to create communities with oomph – neighbourhoods who are in charge of their own destiny, who feel if they club together and get involved they can shape the world around them (Cameron, 2010).

Though the term 'Big Society' has been much lampooned (e.g. Bell, 2011; Guru-Murthy, 2011; Stephens, 2011; Wheeler, 2011) as without substance, the extract from Cameron's speech, given two months after he became Prime Minister, lays out its assumptions rather clearly. It begins from a premise that 'the way government has worked' has been damaging to both practitioners and citizens; that this is a result of

regulation, 'targets' and centralisation. The prescription is to ask – and require – individual (non-professionals) to take responsibility for their own and others' well-being. That this will be promoted through a 'new culture of voluntarism' suggests some element of 'obliging people to be free' in the mode of practices and policies of governmentality within which community cohesion policy exists, as discussed in Chapter One. The second element of the Big Society project is that the idea of public services as projects of the state, that is, of government with a link to democratic institutions, will be weakened. Again this is framed in the language of 'freedom' – freedom for 'professionals' to meet needs they define (presumably with communities) rather than assessing these against national frameworks – but such 'freedom' to decide will again be obligatory, and will come with the responsibility to deliver. The responsibility (and potential culpability) associated with freedom is also evident in the third element of the Big Society; that 'communities' will be 'empowered'.

That local government is adept at adapting to the changing national policy environment is a theme which has been important throughout the thesis, around the presentation of purpose – language, narrative, myth-making or branding. This was especially apparent in Chapter Six in the discussion of how local authorities presented themselves to one another and within policy worlds, in relation to their reputations as marker points in discussions of community cohesion. In Chapter Five, we saw how the role of local government was envisioned as deeply connected to questions of shared belonging embedded in a desire to control narratives of place.

The questions raised in Chapters Four, Five and Six about the proper and actual roles of local government were not always framed by research participants directly in terms of community cohesion policy. But as we examined the subjects being debated, they were clearly about how to handle and distribute power; about the right to belong; about how to constitute communities; about how to imagine places where communities are constituted. Likewise, in Cameron's Big Society discourse, the language is not necessarily that of community cohesion policy, but the concerns are closely related. There is no mention here of many of the keywords which have become central to community cohesion (though 'communities', or more often 'neighbourhoods' are



central). There is very little mention of diversity, except around 'diverse models of service provision' (i.e. reducing direct government provision of public services). 'Power' is, in fact, mentioned here – but in relation to a supposed redistribution of power of decision-making to more local levels, and not in relation to distribution of social, cultural or economic resources within and across populations. Nonetheless, it is arguable that 'The Big Society' is the narrative framework that practitioners who had learnt to use and adapt the vocabulary of community cohesion must now adopt. Like community cohesion policy, it has linguistic lacunae that can leave silences to be ignored, mobilised, or over-written.

I have included this speculation about new developments here because it demonstrates how the practice of policy continues to evolve. The dominance of 'community cohesion policy' may be over as a central term used by government, but the term itself has stuck in places – statutory duties for schools, some job titles, institutions and publications, at least for the time being. More importantly, the issues that people tried to address through 'community cohesion policy' have not disappeared (any more than they appeared when the term did). Populations may be problematised differently using the language of The Big Society, but equally, as with community cohesion policy, the language and programmes themselves may be bent to address re-imagined problems and solutions through the negotiation of policy. My research shows how, far from Cameron's vision of 'public sector workers [as] disillusioned, weary puppets of government targets', many negotiate difficult subjects (including the subject of the appropriate role and functioning of local government) with skilled manoeuvres around, within and through government targets and narratives. In doing so, they often make use of what might be called a 'sociological imagination' – an idea of how personal narratives connect to structural power relations (see particularly Chapters One and Seven).

This research also provides findings which contradict Cameron's sense that 'lively communities' have been turned into 'dull, soulless clones of one another'. I have shown at length in Chapters Five and Six how narratives of place are manoeuvred, negotiated and re-incorporated by policy practitioners. In Chapter Five, we saw how

multiple narratives of Hackney were intertwined in negotiations over the meaning of the place. Notably, each of these narratives were dependent on a sense that Hackney was *special*; that its internal diversity and changeability was connected to a kind of 'sameness in difference', if not solidarity in diversity. In Chapter Six, I discussed the negotiations of policy practitioners firstly projecting and using images of Oldham, Barking and Dagenham and Peterborough as metaphors in narratives of community cohesion policy, and secondly reincorporating these images into new narratives with more positive connotations. Neither of these chapters suggest that the places considered in the thesis or their populations are 'dull, soulless clones'.

Cameron does not describe what he means by 'the way government has worked' but implies this has been about central control of local activities. Throughout this thesis, I have shown how national policy narratives and techniques shape local understandings of priorities, needs and populations. But importantly, I have also shown that this is far from a direct relationship of command-and-control. Rather, narratives within policy and government incorporate existing meanings and resonances while individuals and groups of policy practitioners reflexively interpret, and sometimes deliberately subvert, the meanings of national policy narratives in the context of their own professional, personal, political and ethical experiences, knowledge and priorities.

This is not to say that nationally-mandated government priorities have not had an effect on how local government operates – as I have discussed, they are deeply entangled. But local authorities, or more accurately, the practitioners who make up local governance, do not have their practices or interpretations fixed in place by national governing techniques. Rather, they operate within regimes of governmentality. Governmentality has most usually been used as a way of understanding the management of populations by 'obliging them to be free' i.e. requiring self-government where individuals *choose* how to behave, but where behaviour within normative frameworks and parameters is the only thinkable 'choice' (Rose, 1999). Such techniques usually do not require forcible coercion, because populations, in the main, choose to behave in normative ways of their own accord in order to avoid expected penalties for moving outside of the norm; but because the rules are often unspoken,

there remains room for incremental change and manoeuvre. The thesis builds on the considerable work on governmentality as a technique for managing *populations*, to demonstrate how such dynamics also operate *within* practices of government – my research develops the study of *the conduct of conduct* to engage with *the conduct of the conduct of conduct*. The policy practitioners in this study were engaged in finding ways to get populations to behave as cohesive communities; but they were doing so because this was part of the normative expectations of them within the regime of governmentality of their professional statuses.

Throughout the thesis I have considered numerous examples of research participants describing their location and practices in terms that reveal the contradictions of being at once free to make decisions, and obliged to make those decisions in specified ways. On a broader scale, the relationship between national and local institutions of government in England and Wales (and beyond) is an excellent example of this apparent contradiction. Through successive governments there has been a pervasive rhetoric of 'localism' or 'devolution' which suggests that a priority is to allow decision-making at the smallest unit of governance. Yet, as measures (such as Local Area Agreements – see Chapter Four) have increased local accountability, they have set frameworks for the types of decisions that can be made and the ways in which they should be made. If the speech on The Big Society quoted above is any indication, it seems that this dynamic will continue to determine the role of local government (and practitioners within it), as government 'fosters' designated 'cultures of voluntarism'; professionals are given 'freedom' (and responsibility) for delivering services and encouraged to do this through 'new providers'; communities must have 'oomph' to be 'in charge of their own destiny' and organise themselves accordingly. This thesis explores what it means to negotiate the shifting terms and contradictions of policy process and government, and to find ways of recognising these difficulties whilst working within and against them. Finally, I want to argue that conducting such negotiations should be thought of as a form of applied sociological imagination, and as a potential arena in which to practice public sociology.

***Imagining sociologically, thinking emotionally, and staying uncomfortable***

Far from 'weary puppets', I have found policy practitioners testing boundaries, if usually remaining within them. The thesis opened with a chapter setting my research in the context of early twenty-first century policies of governmentality. I suggested that to a great extent, to develop such techniques of governing, policy practitioners must have a sense of the relationships between individual choice and structural constraint; that is, they must have a sociological imagination (Mills, 1999 [1959]). As we saw at many points in the thesis, but especially in Chapter Seven, using a sociological imagination within practices of government does not necessarily mean always coming to the same conclusion. It seems to create a variety of uncomfortable positions for those involved in practices of governing, if only because looking at society and one's place in it this way can reveal contradictions which may be impossible to resolve. Jack's narrative of dislocation in this chapter is just one example.

We might also think of Emma's reflection in Chapter Seven that, as a theoretically neutral arbiter of government she felt the need 'to be totally objective, but you can't be'. Or perhaps the way that many research participants in Chapter Six discussed their local areas as obviously linked to community cohesion narratives at the same time that they tried to establish new narratives with which locals and others could associate them. The negotiations of policy practitioners and others in Hackney in Chapter Five, as they tried to find ways to address power inequalities (while recognising their ability to do so relied on their own relative power and privilege) are another example. The ways that research participants (including myself) reflected on the compromises required and made around the implementation of the Preventing Violent Extremism programme in Chapter Four (and the moments when limits of compromise were reached) showed practitioners working within the limits of governance regimes whilst simultaneously able to reflect on these limits, and using their understandings of the limits to attempt some changes within the rules of the game. And Chapter Three, which describes the sets of narratives and resonances that slip past and through one another in practitioners' and others' understandings of community cohesion policy, demonstrates

how the sociological imagination (the ability to make links between historic resonances and current problematisations, specific crises and longer-term trends) is both relied on and confounded by the languages and techniques of policy which use silences and implication to create links that can still be denied. The ongoing tension about a definition of community cohesion, the repetition that this 'goes beyond race and faith', at that very moment indicating the expectation that race and faith are at the heart of its concerns, is an excellent example of this reliance on implicit meanings to communicate the unspoken.

I have written about branding as a way of organising narratives and resonances, particularly in Chapters Five and Six. I have found this a useful way to think about links between governmentality and sociological imagination for three reasons. Firstly, the language of branding appeared in several places in my research data, where participants used it to talk about their work in relation to developing understandings of place, of organisations, of services, of policy concepts. Secondly, the commercial overtones of 'brand' (the context in which it is usually practised and in which it is usually analysed in the sociological literature) are important for a period in which government has tried to emulate many of the processes and logics of private capital (as discussed in Chapter One). But the organisation, ethos, purpose and expectation of public service or government is very different to that of most private enterprise. My work extends the theorisation of brand into the sphere of government, and thereby provides new insights into the importance of narrative-building and presentation, and government through *emotion*. Finally, the apparent intangibility of many techniques of branding, and the importance of the slipperiness and unruliness of brands, their unpredictability, potential for reincorporation and subversion of meaning – their retention of the 'margins of indeterminacy' (Lury, 2004:162) – is a characteristic of branding but also of policy practice. As discussed in Chapter One, the concept of 'community' in itself is attractive precisely because of its 'ambiguous potential' (Schofield, 2002:680). It can connote both nostalgia for a lost past and excitement for building an alternative future. It can suggest innate similarity or commonality across difference. It can be a tool of self-organisation or of oppressive control. This thesis provides new evidence of how such ambiguities constitute both the meanings and

practices of community cohesion policy.

I have demonstrated how the ambiguities of community cohesion policy and of processes of governing through governmentality (of the conduct of the conduct of conduct) are experienced and understood through their emotional, or affective, dimensions. I have argued that my research demonstrates a need to take seriously the narratives – and feelings – of policy practitioners because these are the tools they use to conduct government, with consequences for the populations they govern. This should not be confused with the growing trend to 'measuring happiness', largely associated with behavioural economics, which tends to treat emotional responses (of populations) as more important than material measures of well-being or inequalities of power – which might fit more neatly into Burawoy's typology of policy sociology, as opposed to public sociology (Burawoy, 2004:1607). Rather, my research builds on what is sometimes known as 'the affective turn' in the sociological literature which pays attention to the importance of embodied emotions in social processes (see Ahmed, 2004b; Berlant, 2004; Calhoun, 2001; Fineman, 2000; Gould, 2010; Greco and Stenner, 2008; Hoggett, 2000). My contribution to this literature is to extend existing insights on the role of affect in management of self (Coffey, 1999; Rose, 1999a, 1999b; Hunter, 2005, 2010; Skeggs, 2002, 2004; Stenner et al, 2008); to understand the centrality of emotional techniques to the very rational processes of government; and to pay attention both to how individuals operating within governance structures are subject to difficult negotiations of affect and power, and that they often recognise these complications and incommensurabilities of their work, but find ways to do it anyway. The relative 'silence' on these issues in the sociological literature (Barnes, 2008:477; though see Hunter, 2003 and 2005; Lewis, 2000; Lipsky, 1980; Mayo et al, 2007) suggests that there is room to extend my research in this area further. In particular, my direct access to policy practitioners, beyond reliance on textual analysis, is a relatively unusual approach in governmentality studies (McKee, 2009:479). My extension of the attention to narratives into my methodological approach, following governing narratives to the 'elsewheres' they are built around, has demonstrated some of the contrapuntal, recursive elements of policy practice, and a new model for this type of exploration and for narrative analysis. It has also provided new knowledge on the

processes of governing the specific empirical sites which I researched, which have more often been discussed in community cohesion literature in relation to the *implementation*, rather than the practice or making of, community cohesion policy.

Recognising these ambiguities and indeterminacies means recognising the difficult, unstable balances that many policy practitioners (and sociologists) attempt to make when interpreting and intervening in social worlds. Through the application and honing of skill and technique they might aim to deliver ever more definite and precise definitions and solutions to social problems and questions of government. Yet context and interpretation is shifting, and therefore it can be important to remain open (and vulnerable to) the unknown (Gunaratnam, 2009:59). This vulnerability can be lived as an emotional reaction, but this does not necessarily mean it is against reason, or reactionary. As discussed in Chapter Two, if we treat emotion and affect as embodied commitments or reactions to ideas and situations, we may see how their power can also be harnessed to resist dominant norms (Sayer, 2005:100). Recognising emotion within practices of both (public) sociology and policy practice is important not for the sake of sentimentalism or even sympathy, but because structural and political power dynamics are experienced through emotional filters within the everyday. Taking seriously emotional or affective commitments within government does of course produce yet another precarious line to walk. It can slip into a masking of power relations, as in the video discussed earlier in this chapter, or more significantly in some of the manoeuvres around discourses of community and social capital associated with Third Way communitarianism, discussed in Chapter One.

Negotiating such precarious lines is part of the role of a reflective policy practitioner. It is also a negotiation central to critical sociology. As both researcher and policy practitioner I have addressed, particularly in Chapters Two and Four, some of the overlaps and differences between these two roles. They are of course distinguished from one another by their different aims; as a social researcher, to delineate and investigate theoretical and empirical questions and seek their answers; as a policy practitioner, to effect changes which address empirical social problems, within the parameters of government that are available. I am certainly not the only person who

moves between these roles, and indeed my research uncovered many practitioners speaking in the language of, or using models of, sociological theory and research. Yet the conclusions to which this led them to might not necessarily be possible or thinkable in the context of governing. For some, this was approached by silencing the difficulties of the space between ethical commitments as felt and as practised, or developing other languages to talk about and bypass such uncomfortable positions (see especially Chapter Four). For others, it meant creating new narratives which attempted to bring these two imaginaries together (see Chapters Five and Six especially). And yet others attempted to live on a precarious line they felt might not be achievable, but which was worth striving towards, by keeping in mind both the contradictions of their position and attempts to intervene in the world and distributions of power and meaning despite these contradictions. Perhaps this attention to working within contradiction, of staying uncomfortable, is essential to living according to a sociological imagination, and to practising public sociology.



## **Appendix One: Primary documentary sources**

As is the nature of the relationship between the academy and policy-making, there is not always an unambiguous line between those sources used as 'data', and those which form part of the academic debate. Thus this appendix is intended to give an idea of the amount of 'grey literature' accessed, used and analysed in the production of the thesis. For ease of reference, all of the entries here are also included in the main bibliography. In addition to the documents listed here, a number of confidential documents are referenced in Chapter Four. As I discuss in that chapter, I only had access to those documents as an insider to the policy process, and as such have neither included reference details here nor in the bibliography, but simply provided footnotes within the text indicating when I am referring to an 'internal document'.

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## Appendix Two: Interviewees conducted

Research site	Hackney	National	Barking and Dagenham	Peterborough	Oldham
Total number or interviews	43 (with 45 people, plus 1 large meeting)	20 (with 22 people)	5	6	7
Positions of those interviewed (NB for Barking and Dagenham, Oldham and Peterborough this has been combined to preserve anonymity. For national interviews, I have referred to the interviewee's organisation only)	Mayor Chief Exec 4 Directors 6 Cabinet Members 17 Assistant Directors 3 Heads of Service 6 Policy Officers (various directorates) 2 Service managers (various directorates) 1 Police officer 1 voluntary sector representative, 2 cultural commentators (see Chapter Five), plus one large meeting of voluntary and community sector representatives.	2 x Communities and Local Government Department; 2x Improvement and Development Agency; Local Government Association; Commission on Integration and Cohesion; UK Borders Agency; Department of Industry, Universities and Skills; Institute for Public Policy Research; Young Foundation; New Local Government Network; 2 x Equalities and Human Rights Commission; 2 x Institute for Community Cohesion; Institute for Economic Affairs; Centre Forum; Department for	2 x Community Cohesion Lead Officer, 2x Directors, 2 x Cabinet Member, Former Cabinet Member, Assistant Director, 2x Race Equality Council Head, Head of Equalities, Head of Strategy, 2x Interfaith workers, 2 x community and voluntary sector leaders, Neighbourhood and Community Engagement Manager, Chair of Cohesion Board		

		Children, Schools and Families; 2 x Local Government Information Unit; Social Market Foundation.	
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### Appendix Three: Glossary of interviewees

Ahmed	local authority officer in Peterborough
Alice	senior local authority officer in Hackney
Alison	worked for an organisation that represents local government interest to national government and vice versa
Amrit	worked in race equality in Peterborough
Andrew	local government equalities officer
Angela	senior local government officer in Hackney
Anne	former Oldham councillor
Anthony	policy manager in Hackney
Beverley	worked in a national-level local government lobbying organisation
Brian	a senior local police officer involved in community cohesion work in Hackney
Colin	councillor in Peterborough
Craig	a police officer who had worked with community cohesion and PVE issues
David	one of the most senior local government officers in Hackney
Donald	senior officer in a free market think tank
Ed	a national think tank researcher
Ellen	local authority officer in Hackney
Emma	a senior officer in Hackney
Erin	worked for a community organisation in Peterborough
Evan	senior manager in Hackney
Glen	senior local authority officer in Oldham
Jack	worked on community cohesion policy
Jim	councillor in Oldham
Joe	senior politician in Hackney
June	senior local authority officer in Barking and Dagenham
Karen	local authority officer in Hackney
Laura	senior officer whose work was partly related to publicity in Hackney
Liam	voluntary sector leader in Barking and Dagenham

Marie	worked in equality policy
Mark	an Assistant Director in Hackney
Michelle	a leading councillor in Hackney
Mike	interfaith leader in Oldham
Nadia	a London councillor
Owen	a policy practitioner in Hackney
Phil	senior local authority officer in Barking and Dagenham
Philippa	worked for a local government research organisation
Rachel	social care manager in Hackney
Rafiq	worked for an interfaith organisation in Oldham
Rob	senior local government officer in Hackney
Ron	senior officer at Oldham Council
Ruth	local authority officer
Saida	was directly engaged with implementing PVE in Hackney
Sally	works in the voluntary sector in Hackney
Sam	senior politician in Hackney
Siv	senior local government officer in Hackney
Steve	worked for a race equality organisation in Oldham
Stuart	senior local authority officer in Peterborough
Thomas	national community cohesion expert

#### Appendix Four: Glossary of Abbreviations

ASBO	Anti-Social Behaviour Order
BME	Black and minority ethnic
BNP	British National Party
CASE	Collaborative studentship
CLG	Communities and Local Government Department (also known as DCLG)
COIC	Commission on Integration and Cohesion
DCLG	Department of Communities and Local Government (also known as CLG)
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
GOL	Government Office for London
ICoCo	Institute of Community Cohesion
LAA	Local Area Agreement
LBH	London Borough of Hackney
LGA	Local Government Association
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership
MPA	Metropolitan Police Authority
PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism
RAT	Race Awareness Training



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